Reading skin in Victorian newspapers: an analysis of British newspapers' coverage of human skin, 1840-1900

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READING SKIN IN VICTORIAN NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

This thesis employs keyword-based searches in digital newspaper archives to identify recurrent patterns and themes in reports concerning human skin between the years 1840 and 1900 in Britain. The thesis argues that Victorian newspapers used the skin to foster three main Victorian social campaigns: the sanitation movement, which aimed at improving health and disseminating awareness about the importance of personal hygiene and cleanliness; the anti-Poor Law campaign, which created opposition to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, in particular to the establishment of deterrent workhouses; and the campaign to abolish flogging in the military, a movement started earlier in the century which was to see its greatest achievement in 1881 with the official suppression of the practice after a long series of legal reforms. Regular news coverage of stories related to the human skin fulfilled two more purposes, the epistemological and the commercial. It enhanced the popular understanding of dermatology and attracted revenue in the form of advertisements from the booming skin products market.

The thesis is broken down into six main chapters. Following the literature review and a methodological section, the third chapter shows the two main trends that dominated the media portrayal of the skin within both advertisements and news. The subsequent chapter explores how the idea of the skin as a stratified organ was disseminated through the news coverage of a flogging inquest by *The Times* newspaper. The fifth chapter continues examining *The Times* but moves from the anti-flogging campaign to the anti-Poor Law campaign. This section explores how the paper covered cases regarding the mistreated skin of the poorest classes and cases of death by starvation and neglect. The final chapter looks at the local and national news coverage of occupational skin diseases, with a focus on coal miners and chimney sweeps.

The thesis proposes a new perspective on the history of journalism: it looks at the news coverage of a specific aspect of human anatomy and shows how this fitted the Victorian newspapers regarding four main social issues: public health, poverty, the conditions of soldiers and the condition of the working class.

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Author’s Declaration

I, Diana Garrisi, declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work

Introduction

In September 2009, as I was having breakfast reading the *South Wales Echo* in Cardiff, my attention was struck by this news: 'Toxic sofa victims await compensation pay-out'.[1] It was not the headline which attracted my interest but the image published (Fig. 0.1). This was the bare back of Edward Hartman, a 77 year-old pensioner from Ely whose back, scalp and neck skin had peeled off in consequence of a toxic substance released from a sofa he bought from Argos. As the picture displays, the skin, in contact with the chemicals present in the sofa's leather, developed symmetrical, radial, burn-like lesions.

Figure 0.1 Edward Hartman. Source: Walesonline.co.uk

I was surprised that such an image could find a place in a newspaper as I did not recollect from my experience in Italy, the country where I was born and had lived until then, seeing many naked injured bodies in the daily press, in particular with a domestic environment shown in the background such as the one within this picture.

[1] Abby Bolter, 'Toxic sofa victims await compensation pay-out', *South Wales Echo*, 22 September 2009.

Then I began to wonder whether British readers could in fact have been more prepared to decode that image than I was. In a first attempt to understand the presence of that photograph on my breakfast table I started to make comparisons between Italian and British culture. Two elements emerged in this comparison: the first is that Italians have always read very few newspapers and this has affected circulation and advertising revenue, thus preventing newspapers from occupying a competitive position in the mass media market. As Marcel Broersma observed: newspaper circulation was low in nineteenth century Mediterranean countries because the economy was not fully developed, journalism was strongly affected by state's intervention which delayed the growth of a commercial press.[2] According to the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, in Italy around 3,990,500 newspapers are sold every day, and they are read by 22.5 million people in a population of around 60,782,000 inhabitants.[3] In Britain, around 12.6 million are sold every day in a population of around 64,100,000 inhabitants, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC).[4] The difficulty of the Italian daily press in penetrating the market has historical roots: in the second half of the nineteenth century, while in Britain the press was thriving, in Italy the editorial market remained weak, not very diversified and with a strong political connotation.[5]

The second issue concerns the scientific culture in Italy and its dialogue with the lay press. The Industrial Revolution, commencing in Britain in the second

[2] Marcel Broersma (ed.) *Form and Style in Journalism*, (Leuven: Peters, 2007), p.ix.
[3] World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, 'Il Rapporto 2013 sull'Industria Italiana dei quotidiani'. Available at: http://www.fieg.it/upload/documenti_allegati/RAPPORTO%202013%20SUI%20QUOTIDIANI%20-%20INDICATORI-CHIAVE.pdf [Accessed 05/08/2014].
[4] Roy Greenslade, 'Look at how many newspapers are still sold every day in the UK', *Guardian* 14 December 2010. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2010/dec/14/newspapers-abcs [Accessed 05/08/2014].
[5] Paolo Murialdi, *Storia del Giornalismo Italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), p.54.

half of the eighteenth century, inaugurated a new era in the relationship between science, technology and economy, radically modifying mass production; furthermore, the development of experimental physiology, microbiology and comparative anatomy made available new tools to medicine. In this context Italy remained in a marginal position.[6] Usually the cause of the limited dissemination of scientific culture in Italy is located in a persistent tradition prioritizing humanistic and juridical studies over science. This attitude is reflected in the Italian literary tradition during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Italian literary men tended to neglect scientific culture.[7] This might have exacerbated the division between science and humanities. Today Italian scientists are not keen on working with the daily press to disseminate news useful for everyday life, as they dismiss the lay press as an inadequate tool for science communication.[8]

The reflections prompted by the story of the toxic sofa persuaded me to look at what happened in nineteenth-century Britain that did not happen in Italy. The publication in the *South Wales Echo* and in other papers of the bare, burned back might be easily interpreted as a typical means to create sensationalism through the exposition of the naked, wounded body. This thesis demonstrates that the answer is not that simple: the cultural transformations that took place in Britain in the nineteenth century and that might have affected the public understanding of the injured skin must be taken into account. The story of the toxic sofa was widely covered by both local and national media as it involved the largest consumer group

[6] Lucio Russo and Emanuela Santoni, *Ingegni Minuti: una Storia della Scienza in Italia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2010), p.228.
[7] Ibid., p.234.
[8] Gilberto Corbellini and Armando Massarenti, 'Giornalismo e Cultura Scientifica in Italia'. Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, available at: http://www.cnr.it/eventi/index/evento/id/13439 [Accessed: 07/08/2014].

litigation in British legal history. Over a thousand people all over the country suffered skin injuries caused by a 'toxic sofa' sold by three well-known retailers.[9]At the end of the trial the High Court declared that hundreds of customers who had been affected by the chemical contained in the leather sofa would share a pay-out of up to £20 million.[10] The story of the toxic sofa's customers, who complained that their skin felt like it was on fire as they were watching television, made headlines for years: the group litigation started in 2008 and concluded in 2010. Images of limbs, backs and even the face of a baby with the cheek inflamed circulated widely in print, television and online. Broadsheets' readers were spared the photographic details: the *Guardian*, *The Times*, the *Independent* and *Daily Telegraph* did not publish the pictures of the injured victims. However, both broadsheets and tabloids described in detail the type of injury caused by dimethyl fumarate, the anti-mould agent used to protect the sofa's leather which caused the wounds. The effects of this organic solvent, and indeed its presence in the sofa, were unknown to the customers who believed they were suffering from conditions ranging from skin cancer to pet allergies. The chemical substance was eventually withdrawn by the EU: in the meanwhile a new expression had been coined: 'sofa dermatitis'. The public uproar stirred up the attention of the scientific community and it was soon discovered that the epidemic of severe dermatitis from sofas and chairs had started in Finland in 2006 and was linked to furniture manufactured in China.[11]

[9] The retailers in question were Argos, Land of Leather and Walmsleys.
[10] Rebecca Smithers, 'Buyers of toxic leather to share pounds 20m pay-out: Victims suffered rashes and breathing problems', *Guardian*, 27 April 2010.
[11] Tapio Rantanen, 'The Cause of the Chinese Sofa/Chair Dermatitis Epidemic is Likely to be Contact Allergy to Dimethylfumarate, a Novel Potent Contact Sensitizer', *British Journal of Dermatology* 159:1 (2008), p.218-221.

The news coverage of this story showed how publishing pictures (or omitting to do so) displaying images of damaged, wounded, bruised or burned arms or legs, backs or faces may elicit different responses from the readers. Calling the lesions 'wounds' or 'burns' reveals semantic choices that not only tell us something about the newspaper's agenda or its sources, such as its dialogue with medical and legal professionals. They are also criteria that sit within a journalistic tradition of news stories related to human skin which dates back to the Victorian period.

As this thesis will demonstrate, since the Victorian period the skin became a favourite topic of the Victorian newspapers for the richness of expressive possibilities it has to offer in all its meanings, both metaphorical and literal. Even then, the newspaper portrayal of topics concerning the skin was entangled not only with medicine and health, as one would rightly expect, but also with moral, legal and political questions. Assuming that newspapers are a poor vehicle for health communication because of their ephemeral nature has led many historians to overlook their significance in the history of the popularization of science, and of public health in particular.[12] Most academic attention has focused on Victorian periodicals but the role played by newspapers in disseminating knowledge of human anatomy, namely the skin, has been neglected. This thesis values newspapers' ephemerality in playing a significant role in spreading knowledge and understanding in the Victorian era of what it meant to be made of flesh and blood. Examining how newspapers depicted issues regarding the skin sheds a new light on the history of Victorian newspapers by positioning them at the centre of a debate concerning both the care of oneself and of

[12] The adjective 'ephemeral' here refers more than to the content to the format itself. Certainly the format affects the content in the way topics of very different nature (politics, crime, sport news, literature) are included in the same product in a fragmentary form. Margaret Beetham noted: "Periodicals [generic term including newspapers] are among the most ephemeral of printed forms. Read today and rubbish tomorrow, each number of a periodical becomes obsolete as soon as the next comes out." In Laurel Brake, Aled Jones and Lionel Madden, *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.19

others. By promoting the observation and understanding of the skin in the Victorian period, the newspaper has offered tools for the observation and understanding of the newspapers themselves to the contemporary media historian.

This research contends that the thriving of print culture in the nineteenth century was an essential conduit for the popularization of knowledge about the properties of the human skin among the general public. In particular, this thesis argues that the Victorian newspaper was one of the main tools through which the promotion of 'skin literacy' was pursued in the nineteenth century. Martin Conboy has explained that popular campaigns have been recurrently employed by the newspapers to promote an image of themselves as taking an active part in social transformations: hence by promoting a good cause, the press strengthened its readership. Conboy stated: 'The newspapers' own campaigns can act as self-publicity and as agenda focus'.[13] In fact, by running stories about the skin, the Victorian newspaper reinforced its readership in many different instances. The thesis will show how the newspapers identified, in the news coverage of the skin, a key strategy to meet at least three fundamental requirements for the press. The first one was political, as the skin was used as an argument to promote popular campaigns for the improvement of society; the second was epistemological, as the newspaper operated as a tool to disseminate health-care information about the skin's functions and characteristics; and finally, the third requirement was commercial, as the demand for skin products increased and new brands were widely advertised in the newspapers' columns.

[13] Martin Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture* (London: Sage, 2002), p.145.

From a political and epistemological perspective a key role was played by the statements reported *verbatim* by the reporters from forensic examinations. This thesis demonstrates that the news coverage of the public *post-mortem* examination bridged the gap between medicine, law and popular understanding of the human body. The medical discussion arising from these examinations of the body sparked public attention to the characteristics of human anatomy. But those bodies were not representative of the whole society. They were mainly the unclaimed bodies of the less well-off classes. Therefore, writing about the skin meant writing about the flaws of industrialized society: disease, poverty and cruelty to people. Furthermore, writing about the skin was instrumental in attracting advertisements at a time which saw a boom in the launch of skin products. The care of the skin came to be associated with the degree of beauty and cleanliness of an individual. Displaying a beautiful and dirt-free skin became a paradigm of moral values and social status.

This thesis does not intend to assess whether a newspaper could be a good vehicle of health communication. This work suggests that the quality of information provided by the newspaper must be evaluated taking into account its ephemerality. This analysis of the Victorian press has shown how the newspaper managed to give different shapes for different purposes to the most eclectic of the topics: skin. 'The skin it's a lucky subject', noted the *Eclectic Magazine* in 1846, with reference to English surgeon Erasmus Wilson's *Healthy Skin* book 'for we all have skin and our health greatly depends upon its health'.[14] It is the skin's thematic malleability that made it so suitable for the most varied uses in a newspaper. As Steven Connor observes:

[14] 'Erasmus Wilson on the Skin', *Eclectic Magazine* 7:2 (1846), p.208.

> The skin provides a good opportunity for enquiring into the material imagination because it is bilateral, both matter and image, stuff and sign […] The skin, in all its many allotropes, seems to be the stuff, or the emblem of the stuff, of which we are composed, the model for many of the ways in which we meet with the material world, and shape it to our ends or its: as clay, fabric, membrane, armour, powder, breath, light.[15]

The newspaper coverage reflected this unpredictability. This is why this thesis denies the existence of a chronological demarcation in the general understanding of the skin. The structure of the skin might give rise to two interpretations: one horizontal where the skin is perceived as an impermeable but superficial layer, and another one vertical, where the skin is seen as an integral, porous part of the human body connected to inner organs. As the newspapers' analysis will demonstrate, these ideas were not mutually exclusive but in practice they persisted together in the collective imaginary.

This thesis is structured into six chapters and an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter offers an insight into the main critical points of current knowledge on skin, newspapers and Victorians. Being an interdisciplinary work, the literature review starts by discussing the relationship between media and health in general and then it narrows the discourse down to science and Victorian media in particular. The section then tackles the various interpretations provided by cultural historians of the public understanding of the skin, focusing on the most recurrent meanings attached to it. The chapter concludes specifically by addressing the history of the cultural meaning of the diseased and marked skin. The methods chapter explains how the discourse analysis of images and texts was applied to articles

[15] Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004), p.41.

retrieved from digital archives through keyword based searches. This part of the thesis stresses the advantages of the new research opportunities offered by digitization as well as their drawbacks. The methodological section is followed by the third chapter, the first of the findings chapters. This chapter argues that writing about skin was highly functional for the paper's distribution since it fitted in both knowledge campaigns, specifically the sanitation movement, and in advertising campaigns. The fourth chapter will discuss the notorious case of a British soldier who died from the effects of punishment by flogging. This chapter argues that the media coverage of the fatal flogging enhanced the understanding of the skin, which was then seen no longer merely as an impermeable, superficial layer but also as a sensitive passageway to inner vital organs. The chapter also argues that *The Times* incorporated the new understanding of the skin in a public campaign then underway to ban corporal punishment from the military: the anti-flogging campaign. A discussion of deaths in workhouses, using case studies, will inform the fifth chapter. This part will show how the interest of newspapers mostly focused on the skin of the poorest class of people, transforming their wounds into a symbol of the failure of the New Poor Law. Cases of news coverage of deaths by bed-sores will be examined in detail. The sixth chapter will analyse the local and national newspapers' portrayal of cases of occupational skin diseases, especially those of coal miners and chimney sweeps. In contrast to the former chapters, this section will show how the press omitted to devote special attention to the skin of the working class. Attacking the industrial system was more controversial because in contrast to the sanitation movement, the anti-Poor Law campaign and the movement against corporal punishment, the reader's feelings were less clear-cut.

Ultimately, this thesis recognizes in the newspaper a key agent in disseminating public knowledge of dermatology in the mid-nineteenth century. In so doing it demonstrates the value of the study of the Victorian newspaper for the history of medicine. It adds a chapter to the cultural history of the skin by arguing that its two already identified main trends – skin as an impermeable superficial layer and skin as a permeable organ connected to the rest of the body - were simultaneously present in popular culture, and not mutually exclusive. Finally, it contributes to a neglected area of media studies: health journalism. It argues for the importance of explaining contemporary phenomena of health journalism by putting them into historical perspective, by tracing back the persistence of recurrent ideas about the human body.

Chapter 1. Literature Review

The history of the newspaper starts with a desire and need to communicate. Societies and cultures are bound by communication, and news is an essential component of this process.[1] Each individual longs for a variety of news: news that is important for practical reasons and news that is important in the extent to which it satisfies curiosity.[2] News can introduce us to both the practical world and the world of imagination. In order to understand the multiple functions performed by a newspaper it is necessary to situate the phenomenon in a larger context by considering other cultural forms of communication. According to Joad Raymond, the writing of news is increasingly studied in relation to other literary modes with the aim of identifying the place occupied by news in print culture generally. Greater attention is also being given to ways of reading and to the political influence of publicity and finally, great stress is being put on who controls the press and how it can be manipulated into a means of influence.[3] This thesis is concerned with providing a qualitative analysis of news content, specifically the newspaper coverage of a topic of human anatomy such as the skin between the years 1840-1900 in the UK. The study of the news coverage of the skin is dictated by Raymond's approach, of situating the newspaper in a larger context while taking into account other cultural phenomena.

This work connects the development of the Victorian newspaper with the development of dermatology in nineteenth-century popular and scientific print culture. See Fig.1.4, chronology of events. The thriving of a variety of publications on the skin,

[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jackson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, in Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.2.
[2] Folker Hanusch, *Representing Death in News* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2010), p.20.
[3] Raymond (2005), op. cit., p.viii.

from pamphlets to newspapers, from popular books to specialised journals, demonstrates that there was a genuine desire for communication revolving round the skin. Throughout the nineteenth century the public interest in the care, functioning and characteristics of the skin grew at least until the development of the germ theory of disease. Towards the end of the century, with the discoveries of French chemist Louis Pasteur and German physician Robert Koch, interest shifted to bacteriology and histopathology of the skin.[4] The skin was, as we will see in the following chapters, a key term signifying more than a book of anatomy could disclose.

This chapter will review the literature of the themes that have shaped this thesis and account for its interdisciplinary nature. Broadly speaking the two main areas of intersection are media history and the history of medicine, with a focus on dermatology and legal medicine. This chapter will highlight the lack of scholarly attention to newspapers as a means of health communication and show how this thesis aims at filling this gap by providing an historical perspective on the role played by newspapers in communicating news about health and care of the skin. The chapter will then give an overview of the history of the press in the Victorian period, in particular with regard to the relationship between popular culture and science. Science is understood as 'the state or fact of knowing'.[5] After discussing how science and medicine in particular were popularized in the second half of the nineteenth century, it will examine previously published works specifically about human skin. This group comprises studies which explicitly address the theme of 'skin' and put it at the core of their contentions, as well as those where the theme of 'skin' emerges in correlation to

[4] William A. Pusey, *The History of Dermatology* (Springfield: Charles Thomas, 1933), p.98.
[5] "science, n.". OED online. June 2014. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/172672?redirectedFrom=science [accessed June 11, 2014].

other main themes (for instance, the function of the public *post-mortem* examination in shaping knowledge of the human body, and the movement of popularization of knowledge of human anatomy). Works dealing with the significance of the skin for beauty standards and the symbolic value of the scarred, blemished, marked or diseased skin will be discussed.

This literature review provides the context and background for this research. It addresses the preliminary questions that stand behind the development of this thesis. To what extent do newspapers talk about skin today? This is a preliminary question to this study because it embraces the idea that our contemporary understanding of news is a legacy of the nineteenth century.[6] Which are the main ways of framing news related to the skin? How did the Victorians address, in newspapers and periodicals, news about medicine and health? How did the social role held by the skin affect the understanding of the human body? Additional contributions directly related to the findings will be discussed in subsequent chapters. This thesis starts with the contemporary because the idea for the project was triggered by reading twenty-first-century British newspapers. It is an impulse to understand the present – in times where the print newspaper is treated as an endangered species – that drove the author of this thesis to look at the past.

Media, health and body

The mass media are generally considered an unreliable vehicle for the communication of scientifically correct information on medicine and health,

[6] Matthew Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers, Victorian Fiction after the Invention of the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.4.

because of their striving for sensationalism, tendency to omit important details and produce inaccuracy.[7] These aspects could potentially undermine the public understanding of health issues because the media can sometimes provide the first introduction to rare diseases.[8] Recent studies have demonstrated the significance of studying the content of scientific and medical news to cast light on the extent to which they shape cultural discourse and popular imagination.[9] Although few in number, there are studies which explore the media coverage of issues related to human skin. Most of them are from the United States, probably because skin cancer is the most common form of cancer there. Furthermore every president, and all but one vice president, since 1980 has been diagnosed with skin cancer.[10] Jo Stryker employed content analysis to examine 921 skin cancer related articles released by the Associated Press between 1979 and 2003 in the US. The research showed how little attention the media has devoted to skin cancer, and how newspapers missed the opportunity to inform people about the disease and the risks of failing to protect oneself from the sun.

Maureen Heneghan has also insisted on the importance of the newspaper as an educational means. She studied a number of articles on skin cancer in the *New York Times* from 1984-2004. The conclusion was that analysing how the print media depict skin cancer supplies valuable feedback for federal agencies and cancer organizations and can ultimately promote skin cancer prevention and

[7] Julie Leask *et al*., 'Media Coverage of Health Issues and how to Work more Effectively with Journalists: a Qualitative Study', *BMC Public Health* 10:535 (2010), p.2.
[8] Matthew S. Harrison *et al*., 'Skin Color Bias in the Workplace: the Media's Role and Implications toward Preference', in Ronald E. Hall (ed.), *Racism in the 21st century: an Empirical Analysis of Skin Color* (New York: Springer, 2008), p.50.
[9] Regan de Bere and Alan Petersen, 'Out of the Dissecting Room: News Media Portrayal of Human Anatomy Teaching and Research', *Social Science and Medicine* 63:1 (2006), p.78.
[10] Jo E. Stryker *et al*. 'A Content Analysis of News Coverage of Skin Cancer Prevention and Detection, 1979 to 2003', *Arch. Dermatolo*. 141:4 (2005), p.495.

education.[11] Although it does not involve a news analysis of print press, the work conducted by a team of researchers at Cardiff University must be mentioned. They studied the media coverage and audience reception of disfigurement in television between 2006 and 2008. The researchers employed content analysis, focus groups and interviews to explore the types of portrayal of disfigurement on terrestrial television output and the audience's responses to these representations. The findings revealed that recurrent patterns occur in the coverage of disfigurement such as association with evil, reclusiveness and bitterness. Furthermore, they are historical archetypes and stereotypes, which are drawn upon in fictional representations of disfigurement.[12] One of the findings of this thesis which can be revealed here is that Victorian newspapers seldom employ the word 'disfigurement' - in spite of the fact that news reports often carried stories of acid attacks against people. There might be two reasons for this. The first one is a terminological problem, as in the nineteenth century it was not clear how to categorize burns and this uncertainty had a striking legal consequence. For example, penalties against people throwing acid were light because then the legal definition of 'wounds' did not include injuries provoked by it. Therefore the offence was treated as a form of common assault - the problem being that the victim did not bleed.[13] The second reason is that the effects of fire and corrosive acids on the epidermis had not been studied extensively. Reconstructive surgery saw its major developments in the twentieth century. This remark is necessary

[11] Maureen K. Heneghan *et al*., 'Skin Cancer Coverage in a National Newspaper: a Teachable Moment', *Journal of Cancer Education* 22:2 (2007), p.103.
[12] Claire Wardle *et al., Media Coverage and Audience Reception of Disfigurement on Television*. Cardiff University and Healing Foundation. Available at: http://cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/resources/09mediacoverageofdisfigurement.pdf
[13] Katherine D. Watson, 'Is a Burn a Wound? Vitriol-throwing in Medico-Legal Context, 1800-1900', in Goold, I. and Kelly, C. (eds.), *Lawyers' Medicine, the Legislature, the Courts and Medical Practice, 1760-2000* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2009), p.61.

because the historical development of the news coverage of the skin had been parallel to progress in the field of dermatology, as specific terms were being gradually translated for the lay public in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, in reference to the research conducted at Cardiff University, the data collected for the thesis confirmed that in the Victorian period visible differences were the most important determinants for classifying people.

This thesis focuses on the Victorian newspaper depiction of white skin only. This is because it is mainly concerned with the discourse of the skin in relation to advancements in the field of dermatology in Britain. The findings revealed that then the black skin was mainly framed within ideas of racism, and the wounds of black people in Britain or in the colonies were seldom acknowledged. One of the most extensively researched topics in the areas of sociology and psychology is the role played by the media in racial discrimination based on skin colour. Matthew Harrison *et al.* have pointed out that many researchers overlooked the topic of skin tone stratification, purely focusing on 'black' and 'white' as collective units.[14] Harrison says: 'The media tends to present us with images that are supposed to define normalcy and essentially inform us of how we should live our lives'. What Harrison says about the lack of information about the gradations of skin colour is as true for today as for the nineteenth century. The popularisation of the study of skin pigmentation in the Victorian age did not receive great attention. For instance, the condition of vitiligo, which causes patches of lighter skin or albinism due to a lack of pigmentation, was framed within the discourse of freak shows because it was

[14] Harrison *et al*. (2008), op. cit., p.47.

more evident in people with a darker complexion. Figure 1.1 shows the extent to which an advertisement for a skin product could make use of racist ideas. It is the famous Pears soap advertisement portraying the instantaneous transformation of a black boy's skin being washed by a white child. According to Anne McClintock, in the Victorian era soap became a metaphor for the imperial civilizing mission of 'washing and clothing the savage'. She wrote:

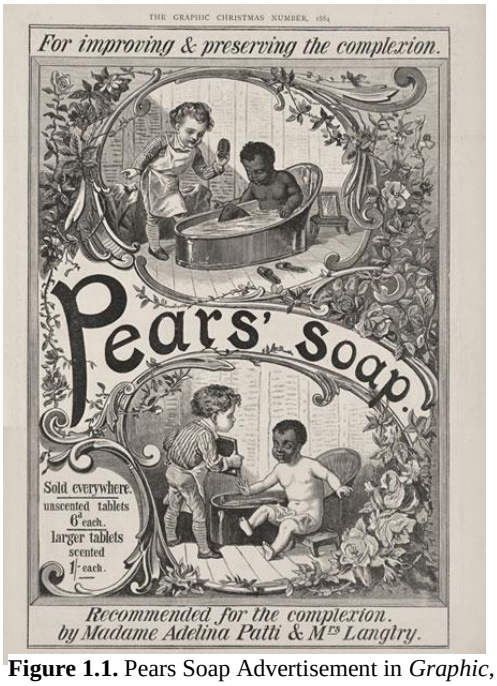

Figure 1.1. Pears Soap Advertisement in *Graphic*, 25 December 1884.

> In the Victorian mirror, the black child witnesses his predetermined destiny of imperial metamorphosis but remains a passive racial hybrid, part black, part white, brought to the brink of civilization by the twin commodity fetishes of soap and mirror.[15]

Skin is a topic whose discussion can trigger very different debates, one of which is the problem of racist representation in the news portrayal of black people. This thesis does not pursue this theme, because it is mainly concerned with the dissemination of medical knowledge of human anatomy. The findings demonstrated that black skin in Victorian newspapers is seldom accompanied by a scientific discussion. It is probable that scientifically based medical knowledge about the different types of skin pigmentations in humans would have led the whole racist case for the existence of a superior race based on physical appearance to fall apart.

[15] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.205.

Richard Gwyn argued that one of the conventional ways of reporting health stories in British newspapers is to frame them within the stylistic features of science fiction. By focusing on the shocking detail, on the threats of invading killer viruses, and by associating diseases with the concepts of 'alien' or 'surreal', as in the case of epidemics or plagues, the news reporting perpetuates what Guy Debord called 'the society of the spectacle'.[16] Susan Moeller highlighted the role of the media in shaping the social construction of epidemic disease, not only as a biological phenomenon but also as a socio-political one. She argued that media portrayal of disease fits into a pre-existing formula: in order to work it has to emphasize the sensational, the macabre and the personal, and metaphors have to be familiar to the audience.[17] Medical stories would fit into what people would expect to find in the news. For example, Denis MacShane identified in 'conflict', 'hardship and danger to community', 'unusualness', 'scandal' and 'individualism' the values which would make an event newsworthy.[18] However, Peter Vasterman points out that news values cannot be seen as a series of selection criteria: in other words, a journalist does not select news having in mind a grid of criteria to tick mechanically.[19] The construction of the news tends to emphasize the elements that would make a good story for the public. In addition to those listed above by MacShane, they include 'reference to something negative, such as violence, crime or catastrophe' and 'human interest'.[20] Putting a wounded body at the centre of a story works well in terms of so-called 'news values', because it constitutes a 'reference to something negative', the connection with ideas of

[16] Richard Gwyn, *Communicating Health and Illness* (London: Sage, 2002), p.93. The work cited is Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).
[17] Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue. How the Media Sells Disease, Famine, War and Death* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.55.
[18] Denis MacShane, *Using the Media* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), p.46.
[19] Peter Vasterman, 'Media Hypes' http://vasterman.blogspot.co.uk/1995/09/media-hypes-framework-for-analysis-of.html [accessed: 3 May 2014] (The article first appeared in Dutch in *Massacommunicatie*, September 1995).
[20] Jackie Harrison, cited in Paul Brighton and Dennis Foy (eds.), *News Values* (London: Sage, 2007), p.9.

death, the possible conflict in the history of the wounded body, the symbolic value of the wound for a story of human interest. Alleged secrets, heroes, villains, strong visual impact, or reference to crime are the main triggers leading to the running of a story today.[21] As the case studies discussed in this thesis will show, these were also the main ingredients of a news story in the Victorian period.

There is a growing literature addressing the media coverage of health issues but it does not put it into a historical perspective, despite an evident connection with the past. Usually, contemporary works provide some historical information as frame or background but fail to track the chronological progression of a particular idea, such as, like in this thesis, the understanding of a part of the human body. As Jean Seaton wrote:

> When we do something as casual as watching a news tragedy unfolding on television, we are part of a long historical tradition of contemplating pain – for self-improvement. The media may be novel, but the experience is the product of a deep-rooted and unacknowledged heritage. Any contemporary image of pain is seen both within the context of recent images and in a longer-term powerful tradition.[22]

Seaton's *Carnage and the Media* provides an example of framing analysis pertinent to the representation of body imagery in the media. Seaton analysed images of violence in television and on the printed page, shedding light on the emotional charge of showing disrupted faces. She also investigated the role played by the media in juxtaposing pain and comfort and the effects that this is likely to have on the audience. In order to understand the use of disturbing images – such as wounded people or death– the process

[21] Mike Jempson, *Working with the Media. Health and Environment Communication* (Bristol: World Health Communication Associates, 2005), p.53.
[22] Jean Seaton, *Carnage and the Media. The Making and Breaking of News about Violence* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p.80.

of making news needs to be reconstructed on two levels. Firstly, diachronically, looking at the evolution of the media's use of violent images; secondly, synchronically, by looking at the contemporary daily news agenda. The two aspects are closely connected. The main problem is therefore what lies behind the purpose of showing images of disrupted bodies. Seaton used the example of the Christian tradition, especially the Catholic image of Jesus wounded. As she writes, all the discussion around the image of Christ and his story focuses on the material form of his body. By looking at medieval imagery of suffering we are able to understand the media use of such images: the purpose is 'to give pain a shape'.[23] Seaton highlights the relationship between the reporting and representation of pain and the Christian tradition, assuming that there is a direct line of descent between ancient Christian imagery and the modern media.

In showing how the observation of a person with pathological signs and diseases is never value-free but is strongly affected by tradition, Sander Gilman said:

> The act of seeing is the act of the creation of historically determined images (and therefore socially accepted) images that permit a distinction to be made between the observer and the Other. On the one hand, this distinction can be simply the line between the observer as "healthy" and the Other as "diseased".[24]

Bernard Lightman argued that the attitude to popularizing science in the Victorian era was so systematic that traditions established then persist in the way science is promulgated today and in the mode in which the public consumes it. The most

[23] Ibid., p.130.
[24] Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation. Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.7.

important heritage would lie in the narrative forms employed to convey mass information to the Victorian audience.[25]

The evolving role of the newspapers in the nineteenth century

There are different proposals when it comes to establishing the dates framing the Victorian era; usually it is referred to as a period of time starting with the crowning of Queen Victoria in 1837 and terminating with her death in 1901. However, other landmarks are often invoked as signals that an age was changing. Francis Thompson identifies in the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway (1830) and the first Reform Act (1832) the two symbols and instruments for the start of the Victorian period. However, he clarifies:

> […] not that 1830 was some decisive turning-point and outstanding landmark in social history, but that it stood in a particularly prominent way at the crossroads between the traditional and the new, neatly demonstrating the twin forces of continuity and change that are always at work in society.[26]

During the Victorian period, almost every year saw political reforms involving either of sanitation, education, trade or the electoral system. The historical parameters on which this thesis is based are mainly those linked to the development of means of communication, the newspaper in particular.

[25] Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science. Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.498.
[26] Francis Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society. A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), p.13.

With the increase of the distributive and service industries already after the 1840s literacy had become more significant.[27] Eventually, at the end of the century newspapers were being read across all social classes.[28] The market reflected the variety of the readership. In the case of London, which was the place where newspapers mostly concentrated, very different literary genres such as the broadside, the penny blood and the weekly newspapers shared about the same portion of the market, borrowing styles, method and very often, text from one another.[29]

One of the greatest challenges in exploring Victorian newspapers is dealing with interdisciplinarity: the challenge lies in linking different fields and combining their respective research methodologies and philosophical approaches. Marcel Broersma emphasized the significance of adopting a multidisciplinary approach. He identified that content analysis and textual analysis enlarge the empirical foundations of media history, which too often is short of a systematic investigation of newspaper content.[30] The story of the periodical press in the Victorian period is multidisciplinary by nature. As Lyn Pykett noted, it is a story that challenges the confines between established epistemological fields and the internal hierarchies and sub-categorizations within distinct academic disciplines; periodicals are not a mirror of Victorian culture but an integral part of it and they can only be read by considering the context of other knowledge about them.[31]

[27] Lee (1976), op. cit., p.32.
[28] Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.48.
[29] Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians. Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.209.
[30] Marcel Broersma, *Form and Style in Journalism* (Leuven: Peters, 2007), p.ix.
[31] Lyn Pykett, 'Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context' in Laurel Brake, Aled Jones and Lionel Madden (eds.), *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.4 and 6.

This thesis argues that connecting the history of newspapers to another discipline, in this case dermatology and its popular representation, can enhance our comprehension of Victorian media history and history of medicine. The first point of connection between two apparently discrete disciplines is the development of printing technology in the nineteenth century. This affected both of them, boosting the circulation of newspapers and popular books about skin care and medical texts of dermatology.

Bill Kovarik sees the introduction of the steam powered engine at *The Times* in 1814 as a key date for the start of a new media era in the nineteenth century. Kovarik states that the development of printing technologies between then and 1850 enhanced newspapers' circulation.[32]

> The revolution from handcrafted printing to industrial printing production is momentous – the cost of production come down, and due to mass circulation, the potential for advertising support goes up […]. Until this moment, books and news publications tended to be fairly expensive and oriented towards the elite. But the new steam powered press allowed the mass media to enter an industrial phase.[33]

However, according to Jean Chalaby, it was between 1830 and 1900 that the average circulation reached over 200 000 for the leading dailies.[34] The production of newspapers was significantly quickened by the development of the rotary printing press in 1840, which made it possible to print on a continuous roll of paper.[35] Although attempts to make distribution systematic through agencies did not start

[32] Bill Kovarik, *Revolutions in Communication: media history from Gutenberg to the digital age* (London: Continuum, 2011).
[33] Ibid. p.48.
[34] Jean K. Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism*, (London: Macmillan, 1998), p.38.
[35] Linda Stratman, *Cruel Deeds and Dreadful Calamities. The Illustrated Police News 1864-1938* (London: British Library, 2011), p.7.

until 1860, contemporary railways dramatically improved the distribution of the press between the mid-1830s and the mid-1850s.[36] The deployment of stereotyping multiplied the number of cylinders for the same page and thereafter production grew proportionally.[37] 1860 has also been defined as the rotary age, because it was in that year that the web-fed rotary perfector, which was able to print from curved stereo plates, gradually replaced older machines, thus increasing the production of large daily newspapers.[38] These developments boosted what John Cooper had recognized, back in the seventeenth century, as a disease called 'the itch of news', also defined by the *London Courant* in 1688 as a 'humour'.[39] From a technological perspective, the two decades running between the 1840s and 1860s are considered of relevance for advancements in the printing process and therefore for the development of the Victorian newspaper.

In addition to new technologies, newspapers' circulation was augmented by the repeal of the 'taxes on knowledge' between 1836 and 1861, which limited press circulation for political reasons and reduced the cost of newspapers. The main phases in taxation reduction were two: between 1833 and 1836 advertisements and paper duty were halved while stamp duty decreased from 4d to a penny. The second phase, between 1853 and 1855, saw the abolition of advertisement and then stamp duty. The multiplication of printed advertisements during the Industrial Revolution is deeply connected with the development of newspapers. Similarly to the history of the press, the history of advertising tends to emphasise the years following the taxes

[36] Lucy Brown, 'Growth of the National Press', in Laurel Brake *et al.* (eds.), *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.136.
[37] Chalaby (1998), op. cit., p.42
[38] Allen Hut, *The Changing Newspaper* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1973), p.49.
[39] Ian Atherton, 'The Itch Grown a Disease: Manuscript Transmission of News in the Seventeenth Century' in Joad Raymond (ed.), *News, Newspapers and Society in Early Modern Britain*, (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p.39.

repeal. Skin products manufacturers, such as soap producers, became major advertising investors towards the end of the century.

One of the most important contributions of the Victorian newspaper is usually considered to be that it made it possible for the most distant classes of society to connect with each other, not only by providing news but also by disputing customary practices, popular beliefs and political authority.[40] However, this progressive idea of the media as a means of democratization needs to be discussed in the light of how the taxes on knowledge affected the Victorian press. Before the second half of the nineteenth century the unstamped press was considered to be the vehicle of radical expression. In 1819 the Stamp Act, by defining any periodical displaying news or opinion as a 'newspaper' and therefore subject to taxation, marked the beginning of a period of political-legal repression of the radical press.[41] The system of taxation was meant to keep the seditious press under control. However a campaign was underway for the repeal of the taxes, in the hope of an increase in cheap newspaper circulation. As James Curran has pointed out, the supporters of the repeal campaign, which included senior liberal politicians, educationalists and businessmen, sought the abolition of the taxes because they could see how to benefit from a commitment to social order, such as ensuring the loyalty of the working class through an increase in the capitalist press.[42] Therefore, whilst on the one hand the press flourished in the second half of the nineteenth-century, on the other hand the radical press declined and with it the voice of the working class. James Curran wrote:

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[40] Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press. Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), p.49.
[41] David Magee, 'Unstamped Press', in Brake Laurel and Demoor Marysa (eds.) *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (London: Academia Press, 2009), p.648.
[42] James Curran, 'The Press as Agency of Social Control', in George Boyce *et al.* (eds.) *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Sage, 1978), p.57.

'The expansion of the market, following the end of newspaper taxation, led to what was, in effect, an industrial revolution in the press.'[43] Newspapers started to compete for, and rely heavily on advertising for profit but the radical press was left out of the game because their readers had a limited capacity to buy goods.[44] News had been a commodity even before the advent of industrialization, therefore an economic dimension had always been important. However, precisely because newspapers have a status other than that of a commodity, other elements shaped them. The political, literary, social and even psychological aspects must be taken into account, as newspapers are to be found at the intersection between objects and practices.[45]

Chalaby argues that the journalist and the journalistic discourse emerged as a distinctive field featuring its own peculiar philological characteristics in the press in the second half of the nineteenth century, in particular between 1855 and 1861, when the taxes on knowledge were repealed.[46] Chalaby contends that before that journalists were 'publicists':

> Publicists experienced their political convictions with great strength and intensity, and the newspapers they publish not only reflect their political beliefs but also their commitment to them. They feel passionately about the cause they promote and write emotionally about it. […] They are directly involved in politics […] They feel an immense sense of duty and write to get things changed.[47]

In addition to greater evidence of feelings and partiality expressed on the side of the articles' writers, a second characteristics of the pre-journalistic era (before 1850s), was the informative nature of the newspapers. That is not to say that newspapers

[43] Ibid., p.67.
[44] Ibid., p.69.
[45] Raymond (2005), op. cit., p.17.
[46] Jean K. Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p.1-2.
[47] Ibid., p.16.

were not informative after that, but before the 1850s that seemed to be one of the primary purposes, which is why so many parliamentary proceedings were reported verbatim. On the one hand we have editorials and articles expressing opinions and feelings and a partial account of reality; on the other hand we have proceedings reported verbatim, and entire lectures reported word for word without an apparent authorial intervention. The result is a balance between a very factual and a very subjective account of news.

Whereas publicists mixed information with personal observations, in the late nineteenth century news reports were constructed around facts and much less around emotions.[48] Chalaby identified two discursive strategies that are particularly connected to the competitive struggles of the second half of the nineteenth century: crusadism and sensationalism.[49] "Crusading" he says "turned poverty into a spectacle and into a gold-mine for journalists".[50] According to Martin Conboy, journalism developed as a result of a negotiation between three interest groups: readers, advertisers and politicians.[51] In this negotiation political campaigning became one of defining features of journalism.

> The reasons why newspapers chose to support such campaigns lies in their special combination of commercial and populist motivations. The campaign was a key genre in the construction of a collective identity through popular and contemporary issues.[52]

[48] Ibid., p.130.
[49] Ibid., p.142.
[50] Ibid., p.143.
[51] Martin Conboy, *Journalism. A Critical History*. (London: Sage, 2004), p.66.
[52] Ibid., p.91.

Stephen Koss stated that sensationalism was unquestionably an integral part of the New Journalism.[53] However, sensationalism is a particularly problematic definition. Chalaby suggests that it should be distinguished into two subcategories: sensational news as a content category and sensationalism as a discursive strategy.[54] New Journalists, such as William T. Stead, stated that 'sensationalism's something aiming to "arrest the eyes of the public."[55] But if we intend sensational to mean the extent to which news appeals to the human senses, then journalism has always been sensational, as long as details of a dissected body appear in the news. What it might have changed is the intention: whereas the sensationalism of the 1840s and 1850s could have been a natural consequence of the narrative treatment of stories involving the human body, with the increasing commercialization of the press, sensationalism was identified as a marketing strategy and promoted through enhanced graphics, big headlines and pictures.

On the other hand, another term coined to indicate the defining characteristics of New Journalism is the 'human interest story', an expression that appeared in the New York Sun in the 1870s. The narrative dimension is key to human interest:

> Many human interest stories seem to mediate between the micro and the macro by relating the particular to the universal. Events related by these stories often allegorize principles, feelings and archetypes which are commonly experienced and universal in character. These categories were the staple of popular culture. Much of folk-tales and fairy tales consisted of symbols which represented universal archetypes. Human interest stories are the journalistic equivalent to

[53] Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of Political Press in Britain* (Chapel Hill: University of North Caroline Press, 1984), p. 354.
[54] Chalaby, op. cit. p.97.
[55] Laurel Brake, 'The Old Journalism and the New' in Joel H. Wiener, *Papers for the Millions. The New Journalism in Britain, 1850 to 1914* (New York: Greenwod Press), p.27.

> earlier forms of popular discourse, sharing the same narrative format and providing the same link to the universal through symbols and allegories.[56]

Mark Hampton also distinguishes two analytical traditions when it comes to study the Victorian newspaper: the educational ideal whereby newspapers were considered as a means to improve society by influencing, informing and elevating and, a representative ideal, whereby the press did not influence but reflected public opinion.[57] Hampton suggests that the press as an educational agent was predominant between 1850 and 1880, whereas later a press which glorified news at the expense of opinion took over, the press as a representative agency.[58] The movement was from a partisan, interpretative journalism, which aimed to instruct, to a 'fact centred' journalism, which sought to reflect reality rather than interpret it.[59] While before the 1880s news was limited mostly to widespread transcriptions of parliamentary debates and speeches by political figures, after the 1880s, in the era known as New Journalism, news became increasingly prominent.[60] However, Hampton also adds that the journalism of education did not disappear with the advent of New Journalism. The reason why the educational ideal would not have abandoned journalism is because learning can be pleasurable and entertaining. With regard to learning he states:

> It's a process involving knowing the new, processing old knowledge in the light of the new, the new gives a sense of possibility and challenges the human nature being finite and the possibility of breaking a mystery.

[56] Ibid., p.102.
[57] Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p.9.
[58] Ibid., p.76.
[59] Kevin Williams, 'Anglo-American Journalism. The Historical Development of practice, style and form' in Marcel Broersma (ed.) (2007) op. cit. p. 2.
[60] Hampton (2004), op. cit.., p.130.

> Rewarding because it may give a sense of fulfilment, independence and power and gives a sense of being connected with what is going around.[61]

In the old formula of journalism, in order to reduce taxes, as much information as possible was packed by editors in each sheet of newsprint; the events were transcribed without much perspective and major articles focused on lengthy leaders and reports of judicial proceedings, which were mostly printed verbatim.[62] This formula changed towards the end of the century. Between the 1850s and 1860s, number of newspapers multiplied, rising from 43 in 1868 to 139 in 1886.[63] Harlan Stensaas concurs with Janowitz (1975), McKerns (1978), and Schiller (1979), in sustaining that objectivity as a news paradigm is due in part to the rise of a positivistic method of observing borrowed from science; new reporting is differentiated by the fact that the former does not draw conclusions from the fact gathered.[64] The problem is that a fact is no longer a fact when it is narrated: it is a story. As such, objectivity can only be an intention or premise but the result might be far from an objective account because the fact needs to be reconstructed according to a specific target audience, which is strictly connected to the business nature of the paper. From this point of view, it can be argued that the journalism of the late nineteenth century was more objective in its intentions. For example, is a parliamentary proceeding reported verbatim more or less objective than its selected reconstruction by a journalist? The answer is that none of them are purely objective because both are forms of a selective process seeking meaning: narration. The

[61] Ibid., p.76-81.
[62] Svennik Høyer 'Old and New Journalism in the London Press. The 1880s and 1890s' in Svennik Høyer and Horst Pöttker (eds.), *Diffusion of the news paradigm*, 1850-2000 (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2005), p.67.
[63] Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p.131.
[64] Harlan S. Stensaas, 'The Rise of the News Paradigm' in Svennik Høyer and Horst Pöttker, *Diffusion of the news paradigm, 1850-2000,* (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2005), p.45.

making of meaning by the telling of stories is one of the oldest cognitive devices that human beings have.[65] It is in the search for meaning that the storyteller loses objectivity and news must be meaningful as a requisite to be publicly shared: the tension between fact and fiction is a permanent feature of news reporting.

The Victorian newspaper was primarily a business; its role as a vehicle of national education or of political democracy was secondary. However, despite recognizing its economic nature, it is generally difficult to pin down its roles. This work provides a mapping of skin coverage: what was its narrative function? What was its commercial function? What does skin say about the development of journalism across the nineteenth century?

Victorian media and science

In the nineteenth century the increasing professionalization of scientific knowledge co-existed with the diffusion of science to a broader public. Scientific idioms began to be translated by journalists and novelists into ordinary language and, for the first time, the wider public had access to information previously available only to experts.[66] Educational establishments were created with the mission of spreading knowledge among the non-professional. One of these cultural centres was the Royal Institution. Created in 1799, this is the oldest independent research body in Britain. It was founded with the aim of connecting people with the world of science. In the specific field of medicine the two key events for the dissemination of medical

[65] Anne Humpherys, 'Popular Narrative and Political Discourse' in Brake (1990), op. cit., p.33.
[66] Jennifer Roderique, 'Re-Contextualizing Martian Vampires: 1890 Science Fiction in Cosmopolitan Magazine', *Media History* 6:1 (2000), p.19.

knowledge were the launch of the medical journal *Lancet*, in 1823, founded by English surgeon Thomas Wakley; and the establishment of the British Medical Association in 1832. The *BMA* played a key role in securing the passing of the Medical Act in 1858, which led the General Medical Council to regulate the medical profession in Britain.

The rise of diversified means of communication changed dramatically the ways to debate science and the measure of authority by altering the relationship between authorship and audience.[67] The word 'scientist' was coined in 1834 by English philosopher William Whewell to define a progressively more self-conscious assembly of people who researched the natural world. This group insisted on distancing itself from the traditional connotations of the 'natural philosopher', in order to professionalize and specialise scientific knowledge and put aside the shadow of dilettantism.[68] Rooted in ancient Greek thought, 'natural philosophy' had reached its completion with Aristotle and his main ideas lasted for 2,000 years, until the advent of modern science. The two core ideas of the Aristotelian system were first, the description of natural objects, based on identification and classification, and second, the verification of knowledge based on proof.[69]

The revolution in scientific communication pertained to the press but it also included scientific museums, exhibitions, and lectures, which provided ideal platforms for the interest in science and visual displays to come together. Oral communication was still dominant and also editors had to ensure that they embraced

[67] Lightman (2007), op. cit., p.13.
[68] Geoffrey Cantor and Sally Shuttleworth (eds.), *Science Serialized. Representations of the Sciences in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals* (London: The MIT Press, 2004), p.2.
[69] Andrew Ede and Lesley B. Cormack, *A History of Science in Society*. *From Philosophy to Utility* (North York: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p.16.

a wider public, which was more acquainted at that time with forms of communications other than written ones. However, the cultural knowledge of the readers who did not belong to the elite of intellectuals derived extensively from magazines, periodicals and newspapers: print media played a key role in forming public attitudes towards science.[70] Furthermore, even if great stress has been put on the role played by the newspaper in disseminating knowledge, it should be said that print culture, in the new urban contexts, including books, pamphlets and magazines, was considerably interactive with a still largely oral culture.[71] Similarly, James Secord remains of the opinion that, although the nineteenth century saw an apotheosis of print, oral performances were, and still are, the main way of making knowledge.[72] In this regard, it must be said that newspapers often reported word by word scientific lectures given publicly by scientists. However Secord, in his study, was more interested in exploring the exchange of scientific news in more informal conversational contexts such as clubs, salons or soirees.

When it comes to entertainment, in the case of London especially, forms of exhibitions included fairs, freak shows, the pantomime, the spectacle, the music hall, art exhibitions, galleries and scientific collections, both at a private and at an institutional level.[73] Classical print and exhibition provided different experiences. The exhibition never replaced the paper, nor the other way round. They became simultaneously a familiar part of the everyday life of Victorian Britain, satisfying

[70] Louise Henson *et al*. (eds.), *Culture and Science in Nineteenth-Century Media* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. xvii.
[71] Raymond Williams, 'The Press and Popular Culture. An Historical Perspective', in Boyce George *et al*. (eds.), *Newspaper History. From the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Sage, 1978), p.45.
[72] James Secord, 'How Scientific Conversation became Shop Talk' in Aileen Fyfe and Bernard Lightman (eds.), *Science in the Marketplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.23.
[73] Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 1.

different needs. As Richard Altick explained, in the exhibitions, in contrast to newspapers, the 'word' became the 'thing', the 'vicarious' became the 'immediate', the 'theoretical' became the 'concrete', the 'general' became the 'specific'.[74] It is in between these elements that the press coverage of skin conditions developed. The skin was a 'word' on a newspaper or a medical journal, and a 'thing' in a medical museum. Since the mid-nineteenth century professionals and non-professionals have been able to visit anatomical museums displaying parts of the human body, real human tissues with skin diseases, or portrayals of them in watercolours or waxes. Sam Alberti noted how medical museums have been central to medical education in Britain:

> Curators juxtaposed organic specimens with paintings, photographs, and models, and rendered them legible with extensive catalogues. Paper, wax and text formed a series of overlapping systems with the morbid body at their centre. They were intended to standardize the educational experience that was the ostensible purpose of most of the museums, and yet visitors refused to be policed, responding powerfully, whether with wonder or disgust.[75]

Newspaper reporters were sent to see special exhibitions of animal and human anatomy the perception of which was altered with the tools of the time, such as the microscope or the magic lantern. A typical example of the cross-dialogue taking place with regard to the popularization of medical knowledge is a famous lecture delivered by Balmanno Squire, surgeon of the British Hospital for Diseases of the Skin, at the Polytechnic Institution on 4 July 1870. The great novelty of the event was not only the application of the magic lantern to medicine but the fact that the event marked its first

[74] Ibid.
[75] Sam Alberti, *Morbid Curiosities. Medical Museums in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.4.

application to cutaneous medicine.[76] The magic lantern was used to show examples of eczema, syphilis, psoriasis, lupus and other common skin conditions. The lecture was delivered to medical students and a note about it was published in the *British Medical Journal*. The brief news was copied and pasted by *Pall Mall Gazette* and published two weeks later.[77] This case brings together a scientific education event, based on oral communication with the aid of optical tools, with a journal for specialists and with a journal for non-specialists.

Back to the distinctions in the representations of knowledge made by Altick, it is within the newspaper itself, as we will see in the following chapters, that knowledge was at times 'theoretical' and at times 'concrete'. It was theoretical when the functions of the skin were explained in the public health columns; it was concrete when the dissection of human bodies was the topic of a news article about the resolution of a sudden case of death, and there, the actual skin was handled and explained to the jury, to the reporters, and to the readers. All these practices, public lectures, exhibitions, fairs and festivals, reverberated in newspapers and connected written with oral culture, the literate with illiterate people, entertainment with knowledge. Without the combination of these elements the diffusion of knowledge would have not been so widespread across different sectors of society. It would have made the distance between the working class and the niches of intellectuals even greater. The Victorian context that enhanced the public making of science is the concrete material setting made of dirt and disease as well as experiments with frogs

[76] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 July 1870.
[77] When copying and pasting from the *BMJ* over one week later the newspaper did not update the date on which the lecture was given. Reading the article in the newspaper it looks like the lecture took place on Monday 18 July, while actually it was delivered two weeks earlier. The action of copy and paste by newspapers sometimes is evident, because the name of the source is sometimes within it; at other times it is not. This is just a reminder of the importance of handling dates published in newspapers with care.

and photographs, and the non-material context, with the spread of positivism, idealism and Evangelicalism.[78]

The popularization of reading for specific purposes is due to two factors that at the same time encouraged and discouraged reading: evangelical religion and utilitarianism.[79] As Richard Altick explained, on the religious side the evangelicals emphasized the importance of the act of reading (the Scripture) as a step on the route to the truthfully enlightened way of living, as they believed that the grace of God could be transmitted through the printed page. Altick says: 'Simply by making the printed word more available, the religious literature societies stimulated the spread of literacy'.[80] On the other hand they discouraged reading texts that did not conform to their faith, such as imaginative literature. On the secular side it was utilitarianism that did much to spread the habit of reading. More than books and pamphlets, newspapers were considered by the utilitarian programme of enlightenment the key tools to disseminate 'useful knowledge', which included facts about chemistry and hydraulics as well as economic and political principles. On the other hand, as for the Evangelicals, reading for 'non-useful' purposes such as self-indulgence or pure pleasure in imaginative literature, or 'random reading', was not much encouraged.[81] The appearance of the first mass-circulation periodicals, in early nineteenth-century Britain, like the *Penny Magazine* of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, re-defined the cultural roles of both science and literature: this type of journals were seen as a means to play a disciplinary role in addressing the potentially

[78] Terry M. Romano, *Making Medicine Scientific* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 2.
[79] Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader*. *A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957), p.99.
[80] Ibid., p.103.
[81] Ibid., p.131-132.

revolutionary spirit of working class readers by using 'highly objectified scientific material' with the aim of limiting the possible interpretative dissent of the readers.[82]

Jean-Pierre Goubert used the example of water in his study on the advent of health in the industrial era. Goubert studied the role of the press in the diffusion of the knowledge of the benefits of water, recognising the major role played by *The Times* in large-scale advertising. The set of images employed for improving the understanding of hygiene borrowed from aspects of older pagan rituals that had lost predominance with the advent of Christianity; therefore the cult of water would have penetrated Victorian life in its secularized form with an emphasis put on its scientific aspects and its socio-sanitary cypher.[83] One of the most comprehensive works exploring the representation of science in periodicals in the nineteenth century is a collection of essays edited by Geoffrey Cantor, Gowan Dawson, Graeme Gooday and other scholars. The main issues investigated are how periodicals were used and produced, their role as place of controversy and interchange, and their contribution to the history of science.[84] One of the essays explored how science was satirized in comic periodicals such as *Punch*, where, according to an article appeared in the *Westminster Review* in 1842, science was delivered to the 'masses' in a way that oscillated between 'pleasurable excitement' and 'intellectual stimulation'.[85] In this essay Richard Noakes argues that *Punch* played a significant role in shaping and determining popular

[82] Jonathan R. Topham, 'The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction and cheap miscellanies in early nineteenth-century Britain', in Geoffrey Cantor, Gowan Dawson, Graeme Gooday *et al.* (eds.), *Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical: Reading the Magazine of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.37.
[83] Jean-Pierre Goubert, *The Conquest of Water. The Advent of Health in the Industrial Age* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p.117-119.
[84] Geoffrey Cantor, Gowan Dawson, Graeme Gooday *et al.* (eds.), *Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical: Reading the Magazine of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.26.
[85] Richard Noakes, 'Punch and Comic Journalism in Mid-Victorian Britain' in Cantor *et al*. (eds.) (2004), op. cit., p.91.

knowledge about science. *Punch* indeed made use of the skin to convey messages ranging from 'pleasurable excitement' and 'intellectual stimulation'. The skin was mostly used in a symbolic or allegoric way to refer to something else. Altick had already illustrated how scientific language was used in *Punch* to comment on non-scientific issues.[86] Of particular interest is the use that *Punch* made of the idea of stains, spots or patches on a face or face-like surface.

A few examples that do not appear in the main part of this thesis, as it concerns newspapers rather than periodicals, are noted here to give an idea of how the skin was framed in *Punch*. Figure1.2 displays an example of 'Puffing Testimonials'. This is about quack medicine: the sponsor for Tally-ho! Sauce is "The Sun" who claims to have suffered for a long time from spots on his face, but after using the sauce he fully recovered. 'The Sun' appears in another instance in Figure1.3 where the spots are a sign of moral degradation. The presence of 'Spots on the Sun' was a recurrent theme in *Punch*, but it was most probably linked to the latest discoveries about the star system rather than dermatology.[87]

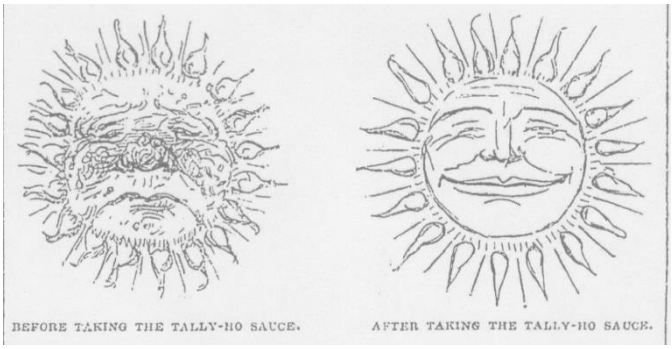

Figure 1.2 *Punch*, 5 April 1845

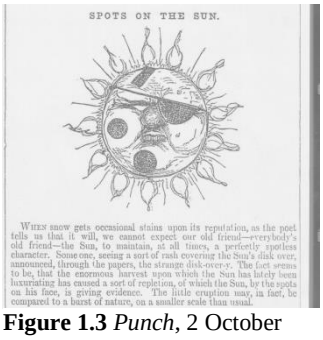

Figure 1.3 *Punch*, 2 October 1847

[86] Altick (1957), op.cit., p.93.
[87] It is worth noting that following the first observations of cyclic variation of the number of sunspots between 1826 and 1843, from 1848 observations on the sun's surface began to be conducted in a systematic way (Bryan Bunch and Alexander Hellemans, *The Timetable of Science* (London: Simon and Schuster Books 1988), p.317.

This thesis argues that the field of dermatology is intrinsically connected to print because of its strong visual component and because it is based on external observation. The development of dermatology in the nineteenth century was not only linked to the development of the press but also to a shift in the way people observed other people. In the Middle Ages *observatio* was marginal to knowledge; it was only used for divination and experiments. Gradually the practice of observing became associated with natural philosophy and in the nineteenth century observation began to be used for learning purposes.[88] David Serlin explained:

> The revolutions of seventeenth and eighteenth century science helped to shift power and authority away from a visual worldview of open-ended and enigmatic interpretations and toward a more concrete and epistemologically static worldview in which the scientific method was used to distinguish that which could be proven empirically from superstition and folklore. By the eighteenth century, the "natural" world was one that could be known not only through the senses but also could be categorized, mapped, and visually and materially possessed by the dominant European scientific and political powers.[89]

The Victorian period saw an outpouring of visual technologies such as the kaleidoscope (1815), the daguerrotype and the photograph (1836 and 1835), the stereoscope (1849), and the cinema (1895). Also included in this period are optical toys, the magic lantern and other techniques of photomechanical reproduction that 'saturated' the world with images from the 1880s.[90] The circulation of visual material in the nineteenth century, which was enhanced by the new printing technologies, was

[88] Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck (eds.), *Histories of Scientific Observation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p.12.
[89] David Serlin, *Imagining Illness. Public Health and Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p.xx
[90] Daston and Lunbeck (eds.) (2001), op. cit., p.270.

driven by a variety of organizations and individuals such as popular and academic publishers, professional associations, industrial patent holders, and medical merchandisers, as well as by political parties and people working in entertainment.[91]

Anatomical dissections have been part of the visual culture of public health since at least the thirteenth century. This thesis argues that the public forensic examination was central to the dissemination of medical knowledge in the nineteenth century. Media studies researcher José van Dijck has pointed out that public autopsies not only reveal how the body was viewed but also how the world was viewed, therefore public *post-mortem* examinations should always be analysed from an historical prospective and related to the particular moment in which they are produced.[92] In the Victorian period in Britain popular spectators for anatomy demonstrations were much more numerous than professional ones: in 1847, in two months, almost 1000 people from non-medical professional fields went to the Museum of the Edinburgh College of Surgeons, whereas less than 50 medical students visited it.[93] These exhibitions usually included artefacts and anatomical specimens from humans, animals and botany. In particular, visitors could see wax models, watercolours representing skin and venereal diseases, monstrosities, and microscopical preparations. There might have been the most disparate reasons for why the popular audience then and now used to attend these displays: ranging between morbid curiosity, desire and necessity to acquire knowledge, and the desire to stimulate imagination. The Greek philosopher Aristotle explained this phenomenon saying that we could enjoy watching things that

[91] Serlin (2010), op. cit., p.xx.
[92] José van Dijck, *The Transparent Body* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), p.5.
[93] Alan Bates, *The Anatomy of Robert Knox. Murder, Mad Science and Medical Regulation in Nineteenth-Century Edinburgh* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), p.117.

may cause distress because we are somehow involved in a learning process from which a pleasure derives:

> We take delight in viewing the most accurate possible images of objects which in themselves cause distress when we see them (e. g. the shapes of the lowest species of animal, and corpses). The reason for this is that understanding is extremely pleasant, not just for philosophers but for others too in the same way, despite their limited capacity for it.[94]

The development of anatomy is linked to the fact that in 1858 the Medical Act began the professional regulation of medical practitioners and this led to an increased demand for bodies to be used in scientific developments. As Elizabeth Hurren has said: 'The boundary of life and death was repugnant, but it was also necessary to breach the medical frontier of the skin barrier in the name of the public good'.[95] The public *post-mortem* examination placed the body in between spectacularization and dissemination of knowledge. The understanding of the body and life is bound to the idea of death: dissection is possible only when the person is dead. From this point of view, the public autopsy could have functioned, for the general public, as a way to exorcize the fear of death and a way to control the emotions produced by the idea of death. One of the things that is hard to establish in the Victorian period is the boundary between knowledge and entertainment in the popularization of science. This is most probably because, as said earlier, this period saw the passage from 'natural philosophy' to professional science. It is arguable that the passage was not abrupt but slow and with plenty of deviations. For example, in the media accounts of *post-mortem* examinations you have both the spectacularization of the wounds on the body and at the same time the publication of the details of the autopsy. This places the body in between morbid

[94] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 48.4.
[95] Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Dying for Victorian Medicine. English Anatomy and its Trade in the Dead Poor, c. 1834-1929* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), p.105.

folklore and scientific practice. As Hurren found out, with the 1832 Anatomy Act, which enabled the bodies of those who died in workhouses to be used for medical purposes, both spectacle and scientific progress were made at the expense of the poor.

Going back to the role played by newspapers, Hurren has said that in the nineteenth century medical professionals wanted to impose their scientific authority on the body to uphold new educational standards. Newspapers helped this cause in particular because getting behind the scene in the dissecting room would have improved the sales of the papers. In fact the stories were structured specially to focus on the dramatic aspect of human anatomy.[96] In spite of the fact that images of dissected bodies were widespread in ballads, popular cartoons and medical textbooks, this theme has not been yet investigated in depth according to Hurren. Looking at how Victorian newspapers used the *post-mortem* examination during legal inquests, as we will see in chapters four, five and six, could add information on how dissection was disseminated though the medium of the press and reports on autopsies. Ruth Richardson has examined a few examples of press coverage of dissections. She explains that the expression 'anatomical examination' replaced the word 'dissection' to indicate this practice, because the latter was linked to the punishment of murder and evoked the punitive destruction of the body. The bodies of murderers, after being hanged, were usually given to the surgeons for dissection.[97] Richardson also presented an example of the press coverage of dissection from the early daily newspaper *Morning Herald*, demonstrating that superstitious views on death were still very strong.

[96] Hurren (2012), op. cit., p.75.
[97] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p.204.

> One report tells the story of a woman who had recently died and been buried in a village near Mansfield. Before her death she had entrusted to a close woman friend some letters from her dead son, with the injunction that they were to be laid with her in her coffin. The friend forgot… [then she] arranged to have the letters put into his [the postman's] coffin, as she firmly believed that he would be as diligent a postman in the other world as he had been in this.[98]

Two inches below the report there appeared an advert for the *Lancet*, offering hospital case-reports, and the text of a lecture on the materiality of the mind. This example shows the overlapping between religious beliefs and science in nineteenth-century newspaper pages.

Cultural histories of the skin

In the last decade studies of the skin have proliferated in several fields in the attempt to make sense of one of the most visible human organs. Perhaps for this reason, it is the one most subject to interpretation. Unlike inner organs such as the heart, the lungs, or the liver, the skin is not exclusively under the dominion of the medical eye, but is open to us all. It is the largest human organ, visible to the naked eye, and the organ *par excellence* of visual social communication. At the end of the eighteenth century physical appearance became an increasingly important way to catch uniqueness, as the surface where individuality emerges, 'the you that makes you you'.[99] Since then the skin has been considered a key clue that would expose how people relate to each other in Western culture. The skin gives information in a figurative way. It is what we are allowed to see and know about others and ourselves.

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[98] Ibid., p.4.
[99] Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria. Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.35.

We present ourselves through the skin and through this exposure, the signs marked on the skin are decoded to convey information about our health, youth, beauty, power, enjoyment, fatigue, embarrassment or suffering.[100]

One of the first of this series of 'skin works', published at the beginning of this century, was Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey's *Thinking Through the Skin.* This is a collection of essays published in 2001 providing a feminist insight into the theme of skin. The book explores the skin's cultural meanings as a boundary and point of connection, a metaphor for both a private and a public space.[101] This was followed by another study carried out by Claudia Benthien in 2002. By using historical anthropology and cultural constructivism, Benthien looked for examples of historical and scientific evidence that might have contributed to shaping the emergence of the skin as a metaphor for the boundary. She explored the relationship between self-consciousness, subjectivity and skin in literature, art and science from the eighteenth century to the present. Methodologically, she proceeded from the particular to the general with the purpose of supporting her main argument. According to this, even if medicine has been able to get into the skin and show the interior of the body, the skin is still perceived as a rigid boundary separating the inner world from the external one.[102] By examining old and contemporary idiomatic expressions about the skin in German and other European languages Benthien identified two main ways of perceiving the skin: as an envelope to enclose the self and as the self itself. According to Benthien, this function of the skin as a separator would have reinforced the idea of the skin as a surface that hides authenticity.[103] In fact, before the

[100] Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004), p.50.
[101] Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, *Thinking Through the Skin* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
[102] Claudia Benthien, *Skin, On the Cultural Border between Self and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p.1.
[103] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

development of dermatology, the typical image of the skin in early modern anatomy was as an excrescence and a covering to be removed in order to discover the truth.[104] However, this image was destined to change in the eighteenth century under the effect of improved tools of scientific observation. The development of clinical-anatomical medicine with the practice of dissection made it possible to explore the body's inside, challenging the long-standing idea of the skin as a structurally impenetrable boundary of the human body.[105]

The notion of the skin as a dividing wall between an internal and an external environment has often led to analogies being drawn between the body and a house. An old proverb says 'The skin is the house we live in'. It is a house where the walls are an example of 'architectural skin'.[106] Since this study of the media coverage of skin conditions is located in the Victorian era, the parallels between house and skin cannot be underestimated. Judith Flanders, in her study of the Victorian home, stated that the house served the purpose of dividing reality between public life and the private sphere.[107] As the skin may represent the whole body, the walls of a house represent the house itself as expressed in a one-dimensional perspective, as it often appears in children's drawings. Flanders did mention the role played by the press in portraying the Victorian home and a few parallels can be established with this thesis investigating how the press reported on the body's walls: the skin. The analogy between skin and house would reinforce the idea of the issue of 'skin' being a major concern in the Victorian period as it represents the division between private and public spheres and the extent to which control and power could be exercised in these spheres. The Victorian sanitary

[104] Javier Moscoso, *Skin: Exhibition Guide, 10 June-26 September* (London: Wellcome Collection 2010), p. 3.
[105] Benthien (2002), op. cit., p.10.
[106] Karin Harather cited in Benthien (2002), op. cit., p.18.
[107] Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), p.4.

movement used the analogy between skin management and house management: in a sanitary congress report published by *The Times* in 1880 it is suggested that both skin and house should be kept clean for the general improvement of both the moral and physical condition of the working classes.[108] A further example of the linkage between the attention to the skin and the care of the house is from the treatises about skin of one of the most famous Victorian dermatologists, Erasmus Wilson. Sanitary reformer Southwood Smith, quoted by Wilson, observed that there is a direct relationship between a clean house and the moral wellbeing of its inhabitants.

> [It] has a direct tendency to make the members of the family sober, peaceable, and considerate of the feeling of happiness of each other; nor is it difficult to trace a connexion between habitual feelings of this sort and the formation of habits of respect for property, for the laws in general, and even for those higher duties and obligations, the observance of which no laws can enforce; whereas a filthy, squalid, unwholesome dwelling, in which none of the decencies common to society, even in the lowest stage of civilization, are or can be observed, tend directly to make every dweller in such a hovel regardless of the feelings and happiness of each other selfish and sensual.[109]

The inclusion of this excerpt in a book about skin demonstrates once again the parallel with the house. If a person taking care of the house practises good morality, then his care of the body will be evident from the state of his skin.

Skin has also repeatedly been metaphorically denoted as a text – 'a surface upon which something can be written'. Skin and its inscriptions 'can be read like any

[108] *The Times*, 24 September 1880, p.4.
[109] This talk was delivered by Southwood Smith before the Royal Commission on the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts in 1844. The passage is reported in the preface of Erasmus Wilson's *Healthy Skin. A Popular Treatise on the Skin and the Hair* (Philadelphia: Blanchard and Lea, 1854), p.ix.

other text'. [110] Erasmus Wilson said 'A well-marked example of eczema is an open page, upon which we may read, with the utmost distinctness, the pathology of the disease'.[111] Viewed as a text or palimpsest, skin becomes subjected to literary analysis. When seen as a canvas, a more visual cultural analysis is warranted. The metaphor of the skin as a tool for writing is linked to the fact that in the past animal skin was used for this purpose. The use of parchment gradually started to replace papyrus around the second century and was then overtaken by paper after 1300-1400. Writing on animal skin is a Western idea since writing on animal skin offended various religious sensibilities, and in China animal skin was never employed because paper was already in use long before it reached the West.[112] The history of the skin is therefore interlaced with the history of writing in the West.

An analysis of how the skin has historically been portrayed across different media has been provided by Steven Connor in his *Book of the Skin*. Connor showed the wide-ranging variety of Western meanings and symbols that have been associated with the skin from classical times to now. Moving in the realm of cultural history, his work follows a chronological path digging into poetry, drama, novels, medical texts, religious commentaries, paintings, photography and film to touch upon skin-related issues such as complexion, disfigurement and notions of stigma attached to marks and blemishes. Connor identified three key stages in the medical history of the skin: in classical and medieval times the skin was perceived as a 'guarantee' of the wholeness of the body, not a part of the body itself; afterwards this idea was replaced by an understanding of the skin as an integument, a screen, a membrane expressing the soul. In the third stage a

[110] Philp K. Wilson, 'Afterword: Reading the Skin, Discerning the Landscape: a Geo-Historical Perspective of our Human Surface' in Jonathan Reinarz and Kevin Siena (eds.), *A Medical History of Skin* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), p.210.
[111] Erasmus Wilson, 'On the Nature, the Varieties, and the Treatment of Eczema', *BMJ* 2:203 (1864), p.569.
[112] Steven R. Fisher, *A History of Writing* (London: Reaktion, 2003), p.238.

more complex understanding of the skin emerged, with its functioning understood in relation to the rest of the body but not detached from it; ultimately the skin came to assume a plurality of meanings well beyond pure anatomy.[113] Nina Jablonski linked the cultural aspects connected to human skin, highlighted by Connor, to biology. She provided an explanation of social habits connected with the functions of the skin such as sweating, tanning, touch, clothing, and pigmentation. By bearing the signs of identity and personality, the skin would be the organ that makes the body a person.[114] Jablonski observed that students of human anatomy showed a sort of reserve when approaching a body to dissect. This reserve disappeared when the skin was removed and it was then that they began to enjoy the exploration of the body's interior. In order to understand the importance of the skin for identifying an individual we can think of the implications of the lack of flesh in the field of archaeology. For example, without the boundary endowed by skin to cover the body, it is difficult to identify the context of individual life, as the body becomes disarticulated and dispersed.[115]

Together with works that address specifically the topic of the skin, such as those discussed earlier written by Benthien, Ahmed and Stacy, Connor and Jablonski, there are a number of studies that narrow the topic down to specific fields of study. One of these is psychoanalysis. Here, the most representative twentieth century work on skin is perhaps Didier Anzieu's *The Skin Ego*, focusing on the relationship between bodily manifestation and mind. More recently Anne Maguire has brought to attention psychosomatic dermatology from a Jungian perspective.[116] Drawing from Carl Jung's experiments aimed at demonstrating a connection between the skin's electrical activities

[113] Connor (2004), op. cit., p.26.
[114] Nina G. Jablonski, *Skin A Natural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p.5.
[115] Joanna R. Sofaer, *The Body as Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.47.
[116] Anne Maguire, *Skin Disease*. *A Message from the Soul. A treatise from a Jungian perspective of psychosomatic dermatology* (London: Free Association Books, 2004).

in response to specific words, Maguire's work explored the relationship between the unconscious psyche and skin diseases. By looking at the role played by the skin in mythology, the Old Testament and fairy tales she found that for the primitive mind the skin was always equated with the soul, and therefore skin diseases were interpreted as messages from the soul. Furthermore, Maguire showed how the terminology of skin diseases is built upon archetypical ideas. 'Lichen Planus' is the name given to a condition where the body gets covered in large papulae. The name is inspired by a type of alga because the surface of the body acquires an appearance which suggests an 'alien parasitic growth'.[117] Lichenification is a relic of the days when medicine was purely descriptive.[118]

Here it is possible to open a parenthesis about the relationship between skin's manifestations and language. Today, when describing an impairment that affects the skin, physicians revert to cultural associations that are strikingly reminiscent of the names invented in the Victorian period by freak show managers. Maguire includes a list of case studies of patients who were given such names: one, a child bearing an inflammatory reaction around the mouth was named 'clown boy' and the author then added that he was a 'sad little clown'.[119] Peter Samman, in writing a history of the first hospital in London for the treatment of skin diseases agrees that, together with the fact that in the past local applications were prescribed with multiple formulations and little value, the employment of long descriptive names is one of the causes of the mystique of dermatology.[120] The ability to describe pathology is one of the most difficult challenges for the physician and the patient. This is true in particular for dermatology, a medical

[117] Ibid., p.108.
[118] Paul K. Buxton, *ABC of Dermatology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p.3.
[119] Maguire (2004), op. cit., p.62.
[120] Peter Samman, *A History of St John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin* (Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press, 1990), p.vii.

field of deduction based on observation whereby an inaccurate description might compromise the effectiveness of the cure.[121] Stafford believes that not all natural history, in particular cells and microscopic organisms, can be put into words. Therefore illuminating figures of speech have to be borrowed from better defined epistemological ranges.[122] The first illustrated book devoted to the study of skin disorders was published in 1798: *On Cutaneous Disease* by Robert Willan. It reveals that the struggle to define skin conditions was apparent from the very first attempt to introduce a classificatory system in dermatology.

Jonathan Reinarz and Kevin Siena edited a medical history of the skin providing a cultural history of the topic through the prism of diseases. They argue that, on the premise that skin is a key to individuals' identities, the shift in the perception of the self taking place from the eighteenth century onwards implied a change in the cultural understanding of injuries to skin as well.[123] Skin came then to be perceived as a border that separates the individuals, protects and contains. Therefore, stigma connected with skin disorders might have gained greater cultural value. The nineteenth century saw a promotion of 'skin literacy' as books on dermatology spread, portraying living patients, containing mainly illustrations and, towards the end of the century, photographs as well. The first dermatological treatises started to appear at the beginning of the eighteenth century in Austria, France, Germany and Great Britain. As Burns has shown in his collection of masterpiece photographs of nineteenth-century dermatology, the 1860s and 1870s

[121] David J. Leffell, *Total Skin. The Definitive Guide to Whole Skin Care for Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), p.8.
[122] Barbara M. Stafford, *Body Criticism. Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (London: The MIT Press, 1993), p.146.
[123] Jonathan Reinarz and Kevin Siena (eds.), *A Medical History of Skin* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), p.3.

are the ground-breaking years for publication of medical photography, and they influenced dermatology more than any other clinical speciality.[124] The beauty and artistic value of drawings and then photographs portraying skin conditions led many scholars to centre their arguments on the visual element. Mechthild Fend studied skin in French art and medicine in the period 1790-1860. From her conclusions it displays more similarities than differences with the British tradition of medical portraiture of bodily surfaces. The main characteristic of dermatological illustrations is that they engage with living patients and this is what it makes them so appealing from an aesthetic point of view. These illustrations do not show the name of the bearer but sometimes a brief summary of his life is provided and therefore the skin condition is not only an image but a story that someone tells - though unfortunately it is a tale unlikely to be told by the patient. Fend embraces the widespread notion of the skin as a boundary, adapting it to the argument proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin; that the delimited body has gradually replaced the older notion of a fluid, porous body in the last three centuries.[125] Fend also explains that the shift in the understanding of the skin emerged through the use of different metaphors to refer to it. The word 'surface' would have replaced the word 'envelope' in the eighteenth century. Furthermore the skin would have been increasingly associated with other forms of medium. For example, a common analogy is between photography and skin as 'analogical media function according to the principle of the trace or index':

> The skin is inscribed within medico-corporeal history and it is by no means coincidental that the transfer medium used in photography, the

[124] Stanley B. Burns, *Skin Pictures. Masterpiece Photographs of Nineteenth-Century Dermatology* (New York: The Burns Archive Press, 2005), p.1.
[125] Mechthild Fend, 'Bodily and Pictorial Surfaces: Skin in French Art and Medicine, 1790-1860', *Art History* 28:3 (2005).

> film negative, in Romance languages is called 'pellicule' or 'pellicula' (pelle being the Latin word for skin).[126]

Mieneke te Hennepe argues that the microscopic discoveries regarding skin in the late seventeenth century contributed to situating the skin in a new cultural framework, but this did not affect medical practice.[127] te Hennepe explored problems of language and classification of skin conditions, the advent of the microscope and the new imagery of skin that it produced; the popularization of skin in connection to hygiene and advertisement, and the early photographic works displaying skin diseases. In conclusion, te Hennepe agrees with Fend that, from the nineteenth century onwards, the skin emerged as an anatomically compound organ with its own physiology and functions.

Most of the literature on the cultural history of the skin seems agree that that the understanding of the skin is connected to a relationship between the self and the world, and that the skin is a key to identity.[128] It is not entirely clear whether it is the development of dermatology that affected this perception of the skin and therefore of the self or whether it is the other way round: a shift in people's identity affected the understanding of the human body. The challenge of attempts to study the skin from a cultural point of view is to trace a linear progression in the understanding of the skin - or clearly identifiable stages, as Connor suggested.

This thesis is concerned with the space occupied by the skin in storytelling: in particular in the form of the newspaper, in the hope that by limiting the area of

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[126] Ibid., p.322.
[127] Mieneke te Hennepe, 'Of the Fisherman's Net and Skin Pores. Reframing Conceptions of Skin in Medicine 1572-1714', in Manfred Horstanshoff (ed.), *Blood, Sweat and Tears. The Changing Concepts of Physiology into Early Modern Europe* (Boston: Brill, 2012), p.524.
[128] Reinarz and Siena (eds.) (2013), op. cit., p.3.

investigation it will be possible to isolate some definite meanings attached to the skin in the nineteenth century. Attaching the metaphor to a purpose, such as the aims of a publication such as a newspaper, might help to give concrete form to ideas that otherwise seems very abstract and ambiguous. Although in this research Victorian fictional literature has not been investigated, the relationship between news and fictional narrative is close and they influence each other. In particular, whilst the skin has provided the press with powerful human stories, it has been used to a greater extent in poetry and fiction as a literary device, at least from Homer onwards. In Greek mythology the skin has often been a key element in the deployment of a story: either as animal skin, as in the story of the Golden Fleece with curative powers; or as wounded skin, if we think of the war wounds in Homer's poems or the myth of the wounded healer whose curative powers are determined by the fact of being wounded himself. This idea continued well into the medieval period with the alleged curative power held by saints' relics and it is also found in the nineteenth century in western folk medicine, when it was believed that touching the skin of a criminal's corpse could have a healing power against skin disease.[129]

Auerbach developed a theory on the use of the scar as a literary device in Homeric poems. According to the German philologist the scar serves two main purposes. Firstly, it works as a digression and as a retarding element. When for example we come across Odysseus' scar, in book 19, discovered by his nurse Euryclea, we are told it was as the result of a hunting accident that is then described.[130] The digression aims at slowing the time, creating suspense and alleviating tension at the same time.

[129] Ruth Penfold-Mounce, 'Consuming Criminal Corpse: Fascination with the Dead Criminal Body', *Mortality* 15:3 (2010).
[130] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p.4-23.

The second use of the scar as literary device is to accomplish Homer's style, which is one of externalizing everything and not leaving elements in darkness. The scar and its origin not only must not be left in darkness, they have to be visible, palpable and above all have their place in time. Therefore again, the scar is strictly connected to time. This explanation becomes even more relevant when Auerbach compares the Homeric storytelling tradition to the Biblical one, still around the theme of the scar. Auerbach makes the point that the style of the Old Testament is to provide a universal history fitting God's plan, where each symbol is part of a sequence. The focus is never going to be on the scar as a present, confined event, but on its purpose for the future. Therefore, while in Homer the wounds have to be fully externalized and described as a "free expression", in the Old Testament the wounds are left in obscurity. Rather than fully explaining, they are suggestive, and leave space for a multiplicity of interpretations. Slattery asserts that scars, marks, diseases and tattoos do not only tell the story of an individual: they have to be seen as a cultural symptom.[131] Scars signal continuity between past and present, almost to remind that what is in the past is not completely gone.[132]

Katie Walter has studied the skin in the context of medieval literature and culture. She focused on religion and medical texts circulating in England between the thirteenth and the fifteenth century. According to Walter, the skin proposes a mode of thinking about the self that oscillates between unity and rupture. Skin would emphasize not the hierarchy, but the interdependency of the senses, and lays bare the intimacy of the human, the animal, the divine and the monstrous in medieval natural philosophy,

[131] Dennis P. Slattery, *The Wounded Body* (Albany: State of New York Press, 2000), p.7.
[132] Katharine Young, *Presence in the Flesh. The Body in Medicine* (London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.82.

pastoral and ethical traditions, and in the literary imagination. The ability of the skin to stretch, to fold and tear is associated with the suspension of time, anachronisms and repetition.[133] The skin's mark is a symbol of a ritual of passage through time, which is why one of the recurrent metaphors associated with the skin has been the one of 'time'. Cutting the skin causes pain: that is why in the past, and still today, decorative scars have been used to record significant stages in a person's life. To incise the skin creates a memory which underlines that the person's childhood is now in the past.[134] To Connor the marked skin puts past and present in communication 'running backwards and forwards'.[135] The skin provides a biographical record that should perhaps not be considered historically reliable. The memory attached to skin's signs is a cultural fabrication:

> [...] the fact that we continue to invest the legibility of identity in the skin in spite of knowing its unreliability suggests skin to be a fantasmatic surface, a canvas for what we wish were true – or what we cannot acknowledge to be true. Skin's memory is burdened with the unconscious.[136]

Before the advent of modern medicine, anomalies, birthmarks and moles were seen as carriers of deep meaning; for example, it was believed that a birthmark could be the result of what happened to a mother during a pregnancy. Moles were studied to predict the future of an individual.[137] The Greeks used the term 'stigma' to refer to unusual bodily signs that were interpreted to signify the moral status of the person bearing them.

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[133] Katie L. Walter, *Reading the Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2013), p.2-7.
[134] Jablonski (2006), op. cit., p.157
[135] Steve Connor, 'Mortification', in Sarah Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (eds.), *Thinking through the Skin* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.46.
[136] Jay Prosser, 'Skin Memories', in Sarah Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (eds.), *Thinking through the Skin* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.52.
[137] Jablonski (2006), op. cit., p.123.

The signs could be natural, such as those due to a disease, or artificial such as those which were cut or burnt into the body to show that the bearer was a slave, a criminal or a traitor - in sum, a person to be avoided.[138] Connor traced the history of "immaculacy followed by marking" starting with an analysis of its occurrences in the Bible. The mark is seen as a sign of discredit, to indicate the lawless pagan, and as a guarantee of salvation, as in Leviticus 19:28: 'Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord'.[139] Connor also notes that marking is a modality of the law. In fact, in the ancient Latin world, the law was visualized as public inscription or prescription, on a column or a monument. He explained that in marking the flesh, the law indicates that it is harder, more enduring, than the soft vulnerable flesh; the flesh, by contrast, can grow back around its wound, borrowing the hardness of the wound. When we say that someone has become 'inured' to pain, we are borrowing a metaphor from the Latin *inurere*, to incise by burning, or to brand.[140] In the nineteenth century marking was seen as a taxonomic tool, to signal the poor, the mad, the criminal and the deviant.

Sarah Covington explored the role of the wound as a metaphor in political, legal, military, psychological, and religious writings in seventeenth-century England. Woundedness supplied both functions presented by Theodore Ziolowski when he makes a distinction between a literary image and a metaphor: the wound as a metaphor is both 'a thing with a tangible reality' and 'a means to illuminate the essence of things by exposing previously unrecognized analogies'.[141] Covington then focuses on the

[138] Erving Goffmann, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Penguin, 1968), p.11.
[139] Connor (2004), op. cit., p.81.
[140] Ibid., p.83.
[141] Cited in Sarah Covington, *Wounds, Flesh and Metaphor in Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2009), p.7.

historical and literary portrayal of war wounds and considers the realistic account of soldiers and medics who treated them, as well as the legends, epics and ghost stories developed around the same issue. She said: 'Through England's wounds, seventeenth-century writers asked their contemporaries to remember the times; and it is by their wounds – those abject, bloody, and redemptive conduits - that we should remember them too'.[142] The scar from this perspective may be associated with a positive, heroic masculine trait. For instance, duelling scars dominated the German physiognomy of masculinity in the nineteenth century.[143]

In addition to Slattery and Covington's research on wounds in writings, William Cohen, investigating the relationship between Victorian literature and the senses, argued that when a tale portrays lesions on the skin, it is providing a "somatic vehicle" for passing from racial to national distinctions. The damaged skin enables the inside to emerge and oppose privileged forms such as integrity, consistency, purity and cleanliness.[144] Cohen also examined key events, figures and literary texts on the Victorian attitude towards ideas of bodily materialism in relation to the senses. He argued that novelists adopted scientific models, sometimes anticipating formulations peculiar to the scientists.[145] Mark Seltzer suggested that we live in a world dominated by violence and open-wounded bodies. The 'wound culture' Seltzer refers to describes a society where people can look at wounds on the body as a form of entertainment, and where the fascination with the wounded body is simultaneously an anxiety about the damaged public sphere. This culture, based on fascination with wounds, which mainly

[142] Ibid., p.179.
[143] Sander Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.186.
[144] William Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p.80.
[145] Ibid., p.xii.

developed between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, witnessed a shift at the beginning of 1900. By that time the injured body was no longer a mark of Good or Evil, or a source of stigma, but it entered the everyday lives of people due to the World Wars.[146]

In conclusion, these studies demonstrated that skin is a rhetorical device, a text whose inscriptions can be interpreted in different ways. What happens then if we put this text, the skin, together with another type of text, the page of a newspaper? As we will see, the fusion of these means of communication can affect society. This effect takes shape in the form of dissemination of a popular understanding of human anatomy, and of the anatomy of a newspaper, but above all a comprehension of how people relate to each other. Ultimately, the newspaper's coverage of skin-related issues furnishes instruments for the interpretation of the Victorians and perhaps of our contemporary society as well. The aim of this first chapter was to provide both a theoretical framework and a context for the development of a study investigating the use of skin in Victorian newspapers. As we have seen, the theme of skin could be tackled from almost any discipline. In addition to medicine, it is in the fields of cultural and literary studies that the topic has mainly been investigated. Although the newspaper portrayal of human anatomy has not been studied extensively, in the last decade works on the skin have proliferated in the fields of cultural theory and history (Connor, 2004; Benthien, 2002); physical anthropology (Jablonski, 2006); feminist studies (Ahmed and Stacey, 2001); medical history (Reinarz, 2013); and literature (Walter, 2013). These studies investigated the cultural role played in Western societies by the skin, illustrating that shedding light on how people understand the skin might illuminate the study of people's

[146] Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p.2.

identity. From the literature it emerged that linking the skin to a specific practice, such as legal medicine in the practice of dissection, or a specific medium, such as exploring the roles of the wounds in fictional books, might give more specific answers with regard to our perception of the skin. This is another reason why the role of newspapers in shaping the cultural history of the skin has been unjustly neglected. The questions that will be addressed in the following chapters are: to what extent did the Victorian newspaper covered skin-related issues? Were there recurrent patterns in the news portrayal of the skin? What purpose did the newspaper coverage of the skin serve?

This thesis aims on the one hand to question the existent theory about journalism and on the other to provide new evidence to confirm already established theories. It states that the news coverage of skin during the 1840s reveals aspects of journalism usually ascribed emphatically to the end of the century, such as sensationalism and the investigative role of the newspaper. On the other hand it corroborates the idea of pre-1880s journalism being more educative, for example the informational nature of news about skin, which will be revealed in the following chapters.

Chronology of events

Newspaper			**Dermatology**		**Education**			**Reforms**
William Cobbett founds the *Political Register*	1802	1808	Robert Willan publishes *On Cutaneous Diseases*, first illustrated treatise of skin diseases		Marie Tussaud first wax exhibition	1802	1800	Acts of Union
The Times puts to work a steam powered press	1814	1817	Thomas Bateman publishes *Delineations of Cutaneous Diseases*, first atlas of dermatology		National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor is established	1811	1815	Corn Laws are introduced
Manchester Guardian founded by John E. Taylor	1821	1823	*Lancet* founded by Thomas Wakley		Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge is established	1826	1824	Vagrancy Act
Feargus O'Connor funds Chartist broadsheet *Northern Star*	1837	1832	Anatomy Act		British Association for the Advancement of Science	1833	1834	Poor Law Amendment Act
Punch, illustrated London satirical appears in the market	1841	1841	Robert Willis' *Illustration of Cutaneous Diseases*, first dermatological atlas using lithographic plates		The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals acquires Royal status	1840	1840	Chimney Sweeps Act
The first illustrated newspaper is founded, the	1842	1842	Erasmus Wilson publishes his chief work *Disease of the Skin.*		London Library founded	1841	1842	Mines Act

Illustrated London News			Edwin Chadwick's *Report on Sanitary Conditions*					
First use of telegraph to report news	1844	1845	Erasmus Wilson the first dermatological book written for the general public, *A practical Treatise on Healthy Skin*		First exhibition of paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood	1849	1845	Irish Potato Famine begins
Advertisement Duty abolished	1853	1851	A & F Pears is awarded the prize medal for soap at the Great Exhibition		Public Libraries Act	1850	1858	The Great Stink
Stamp Duty abolished	1855	1852	Repeal of the tax on soap		Establishment of the National Portrait Gallery	1856	1854	Crimean War
Stereotyping is introduced at *The Times*	1857	1858	Medical Act		Publication of Charles Darwin "On the Origin of Species"	1859	1859	
Daily *Pall Mall Gazette* established by George Smith	1865	1864	First photographic atlas of dermatology realised by Alexander Balmanno Squire		Opening of the first Nursing School	1860	1867	Second Reform Act
Walter Hoe Web Rotary Printing Presses introduced at *The Times* Press Association founded	1868	1867	Establishment of the first British dermatological journal, *Journal of Cutaneous Diseases*		First woman doctor	1865	1868	Flogging abolished during peacetime

Central News commences telegraphic operations	1871	1870	Tilbury Fox publishes *Lectures on Eczema, its Nature and Treatment*		Education Act	1872	1870	British Red Cross established
William T. Stead is imprisoned due to his Maiden Tribute in *Pall Mall Gazette*	1886	1886	American Cuticura soap commences international advertising		Education becomes compulsory for children under ten	1880	1881	Abolishment of Flogging in the Army
The term 'New Journalism' is coined by Matthew Arnold	1887	1888	Henry R. Crocker publishes *Treatise on Diseases of the Skin, their Description, Diagnosis and Treatment*		International Exhibition of Science	1888	1888	Whitechapel murders
Kennedy Jones with Harold and Alfred Harmsworth fund the *Daily Mail*	1896	1896	First British International Dermatological Congress		Elementary Education Act	1893	1899	Radio signals first transmitted by Guglielmo Marconi across the channel

Fig. 1.4 Chronology. Sources for the chronology: Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.) *DNCJ*; Dennis Griffiths (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of the British Press*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1992); Ross Eaman, *Historical Dictionary of Journalism*, (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009).

Chapter 2. Some Notes on Sources and Methodology

This chapter will illustrate the challenges and opportunities of studying nineteenth-century newspapers in the twenty first century. The technological and social change of the digital age is the closest equivalent of the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century: both the digital and the industrial revolutions are characterized by advances in technology and multiplication of modes of communication.[1] In order to provide a new interpretative key to Victorian newspapers by analysing stories related to human skin a keyword-based approach was adopted.

The press was in the nineteenth century the fundamental medium of communication of ideas.[2] However, Anthony McNicholas noted that newspapers are usually seen by historians as a means rather than an object of investigation as the press is a useful tool to shed light on the politics of a particular time and place.[3] This thesis aims to reinstate the centrality of the newspaper as a main subject of study. The selection of a specific type of publication, such as the newspaper, might present limits because newspapers only display what is considered appropriate for their audience, for example, what governments could expose and what is in line with the editor's aims.[4] For this reason, the analysis of the sources used was conducted by adopting both 'supporting knowledge and sceptical knowledge'.[5] Moreover, when researchers select a written text with a specific type of content they are prioritizing a particular type of sensitive and cognitive experience.

[1] John A. Walsh, 'Multimedia and Multitasking: A Survey of Digital Resources for Nineteenth-Century Literary Studies' in Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds.) *A Companion Digital Literary Studies* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p.122 and 124.
[2] Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press*, (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p.18.
[3] Anthony McNicholas, *Politics, Religion and the Press. Irish Journalism in Mid-Victorian England* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), p.2.
[4] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (Harlow: Pearson, 2010), p.98.
[5] Ibid. p.122.

In this thesis therefore, this operation had to be conducted with special attention being paid to the Victorian period and the dissemination of medical information at that time. Wounded and diseased skin was a subject covered in Victorian news reports, but it was also displayed in watercolours, paintings and wax works in museums. Skin was a subject of surgeons' lectures but it was also a word with which to form a rhyme in a ballad about skin care. Therefore, questions related to the skin were not only part of written and visual communication but also oral communication. Privileging certain senses over others influences how the medium is employed and how it affects culture and society.[6] Cultural studies' response to these problems is intertextuality, (which is also the response of this thesis); texts need to be analysed in relation to others with which they could have been in conversation:

> Those of us doing textual analysis must be sensitive to the ways in which meaning floats, and how alternative readings can occur, while at the same time not being overly cautious about identifying dominant discourses and visual and textual tropes.[7]

Newspapers have an intertextual nature as they make constant references to what is being said and written somewhere else: they encompass a wide-ranging variety of texts and sensorial experiences. In addition to newspapers' articles and advertisements, other texts have been taken into account to back up the information retrieved through the digital collections. Primary sources other than newspapers included medical journals such as The *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* as well as popular Victorian books on skin care.

[6] Susan J. Douglas, 'Does Textual Analysis Tells us anything about Past Audiences?' in Barbara Zelizer (ed.), *Explorations in Communication and History* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.73.
[7] Ibid., p.75.

A keyword based online search is possible today due to the digital presence of a great deal of Victorian publications. The 19th Century British Library Newspapers Database contains seventy British and Irish national and local newspapers and has over three million digitized pages. The Times Gale Cengage comprises full-text facsimile of nearly 70,000 issues from its foundation in 1785 until 2008. To these digital collections must be added the Illustrated London News Archive, which holds one million illustrations and 13 million articles from the ProQuest Guardian and Observer Digital Archives. The digitization of Victorian newspapers constitutes both a great convenience and a great challenge for studying the history of the press. Despite the figures, the majority of newspapers have not been made available online and when studying them it is necessary to browse hard copies or copies on microfilm. In the last three years, this operation has been complicated by the closure of the British Library Newspapers Collections at Colindale and the massive repositioning of titles at Boston Spa. Meanwhile some titles have not been available because they are in the process of being moved.

Online archives are becoming an increasingly important means of research for media historians as a growing number of papers are being made available electronically. However, there is still an 'offline penumbra' containing a large number of publications which have not yet been digitized, and which may never be digitized. Reading a Victorian newspaper on a screen, browsing pages with one click, making temporal jumps of fifty years in 30 seconds, and enlarging or reducing sizes on demand, are contemporary conditions of knowledge. To some extent it almost seems that the closer and faster the researcher gets to the object of research, the larger the distance to the context in which that object was produced becomes. However, distance is a premise for knowledge. It permits one to concentrate on smaller units, devices, themes, tropes and

genres: ‘If, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something’. Franco Moretti suggests handling philosophically the fact that there is a price to pay for theoretical knowledge. ‘But it’s precisely this “poverty” that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know’, he says. Nevertheless, this is not only true for theoretical knowledge but for any attempt to understand the reality, which must go through an analysis and therefore a deconstruction of the object investigated.

Nicole Maurantonio reflected upon different modes in which researchers have negotiated the challenges of digital technologies as “not to emphasize the primacy of any one form but rather their complementarity in aiding media historians’ struggle to make sense of journalism’s role in the past”.[8] This thesis’ exploration was guided by the keyword ‘skin’, whose references were tracked down in newspapers’ historical digital collections. The keyword search is a strategic mode of enquiry that has furnished new possibilities for approaching popular culture such as tracking the transmission of an idea through texts, periods and places: asking new questions, finding new relationships and moving from the local to the global.[9] The keyword-based method was used as a qualitative research technique and the presence or absence of the word must always be contextualized. This means that the quantitative results displayed by the charts inserted in each chapter have to be intended as means to indicate a general trend rather than a provider of exact statistics.

[8] Nicole Maurantonio, ‘Archiving the Visual’, *Media History* 20:1 (2014), p.90.
[9] Bob Nicholson, ‘You Kick the Bucket; We do the Rest!’: Jokes and the Culture of Reprinting in the Transatlantic Press’, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17:3, (2012), p.274.

In this thesis there were times when the keyword led directly to news stories that shed light on the journalistic usage of skin. This happened in the case of the news coverage of an inquest into the death of a soldier who was flogged at Hounslow, which will be discussed in chapter four. There were cases where the keyword led the research halfway through a story because a more specific terminology then replaced it. This happened in chapter five with regard to inquests into neglect in the workhouses where the general terminology of injured or wounded skin, as the inquest proceeded was substituted with 'bed-sore'. Sticking to the term 'skin' would have led to excluding stories where the theme was indeed discussed but with more specific language. At times the keyword was completely misleading; sometimes it led to articles about animal skin, leather, or naval news, where the term was part of a nautical terminology used to describe a structural part of ships. At times it was necessary to interrogate the absence of the word 'skin' rather than its presence. Therefore the keyword must not be intended as an instrument that will unavoidably lead to valuable data but more as a compass that gives directions regarding how to move through the millions of digitized pages.

Bob Nicholson suggested that a good keyword should precisely identify the idea, object, person, or time and place under analysis.[10] 'Skin' is an accurate keyword because it does not have many synonyms in the non-medical language. As stated previously it might not always refer to humans but when it does there are no alternative terms to signify the *human integument* without resorting to using Latin or a strictly dermatological terminology, which was not part of the newspapers' style. An important criterion listed by Nicholson is that the word should not be susceptible to Optical

[10] Bob Nicholson, 'Counting Culture; or, How to Read Victorian Newspapers from a Distance' *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 17:2 (2012), p.245.

Character Recognition. OCR is software that recognizes printed text and numbers and converts them into electronic text. Its accuracy depends greatly on the quality of the original scanned text. Some problems may occur when there are narrow spaces between lines and inks or when papers have deteriorated. In the word 'skin' sometimes a few letters were misread. For example, 'k' was sometimes misinterpreted as 'c' and 'n' sometimes looked like 'r'. It depends also on the type and date of the material digitized: there are certain items which are very well preserved and scanned like *The Times* and others which show more difficulties in reading such as the *Manchester Guardian*. For the purpose of this research, this meant that the search engine missed the word and maybe a good story with it. However, this does not usually occur to such an extent as to obstruct the progress of the research. Moreover, this thesis has demonstrated that certain primary concerns relating to the skin continue to be repeated many times in the same newspaper or pasted and copied between different titles. The search engine might have missed the word once but it would recover it on the next occasion if it were relevant for the newspaper. A final suggestion for researchers who are searching content through keywords in online newspaper archives is to avoid relying excessively on the advanced search settings, which allow you to restrict the number of results by selecting the option 'keyword'. This mainly looks at titles and introductions, and basically retrieves articles that are only about the keyword, in this case 'skin'. It is a quantitative rather than qualitative research tool (Fig. 2.1).

Figure 1.1 shows the interface of The Times Digital Archive. Once the word 'skin' is typed into the search box you can either research it in the *entire document*, by ticking the left option, or you can restrict the search to *keyword* only, right side.

In this research, this particular option made it possible to quickly retrieve a limited amount of articles where indeed the word 'skin' was in the title or repeated throughout. For example, in this thesis, this tool was useful for providing an overview of the various usages of the term 'skin' in Victorian newspapers, which constitutes the content of chapter three. However, this option might miss articles where the word 'skin' does not look like a keyword because it does not appear in the title or because the article is not solely about skin. Those might be the cases where there is a discussion about skin related to other topics or where the article is making use of the widest semantic area related to the skin, including terms such as injuries, wounds, or bed-sores. In other words, when newspapers talk about human skin it is not always necessary for the word 'skin' to be there.

The peculiarity of most Victorian newspapers lay in them having very different items, including news about the most diverse arguments, as well as advertisements, fictional stories, sheet music and ballads, packaged together to give life to a valuable ephemera. 'These base Ephemeras, so born to die before the next revolving morn',

noted an eighteenth-century poem.[11] Therefore, this research employs analytical methods theorized in media historical studies, which in turn have borrowed extensively from literature and art. Once the articles had been obtained through the keyword based searches the method of analysis was a qualitative approach to the content retrieved through textual analysis.

Methods based on visual analysis were needed on two occasions. The first of these was to look at the use of human portraiture in skin product advertisements in chapter three. The second was in chapter six when these methods were needed in order to explain the censorship action employed by the press in reproducing engravings representing child labourers. These constitute the only examples where information about skin was captured by an image. Usually Victorian newspapers did not publish any images related to skin or skin diseases and scientifically detailed dermatological images found a more suitable place in periodicals, such as the illustrated monthly *Strand Magazine*. *The Times* hardly contains any images at all. Pictorial papers such as the *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic* contain beautifully engraved advertisements but they refrained from portraying bare skin unless the image was framed within articles that were mostly about indigenous people inhabiting British colonies.[12] Penny papers focusing on crimes, such as the *Penny Illustrated Paper* and the *Illustrated Police News* at times contained images of wounds but these were stylised signs that did not add useful information about dermatology. Victorian advertisements have been described by identifying recurrent patterns and modes of representation, looking in particular at references to the classical world. The majority of them, as we will see in chapter three, and then in chapter six, borrow modes of illustration from ancient Greek art. The

[11] George Crabbe, *The News-paper: a Poem* (1785) (London: Cassell and Co., 1886).
[12] For a discussion about nakedness on newspapers see chapter six, section 'Sex in the Mine'.

description of this material constitutes a bridge between sources and interpretation: a description provides the information that the historian needs to formulate interpretative questions about the subject observed.[13] The interpretative analysis of the visual texts was based on a comparison between similar items as well as a focus on the relationship between the image and the text accompanying it. Theo van Leeuwen has individualised two types of visual analysis. The first is content analysis, which is a systematic technique based on observation to test a hypothesis about the modes in which the media portray people.[14] The second is qualitative analysis, which can focus, for example, on the cultural connotations of a particular item. Visual content analysis was used to individualize framed images of skin to obtain an overview of how skin was visually represented in newspapers and how much space it occupied. Qualitative analysis served the purpose of shedding light on Victorian cultural habits such as the use of unblemished skin to convey beauty as well as the employment of classical pictorial conventions. The attempt to put the advertisements in the light of a historical tradition of portraiture served the purpose of explaining hidden meanings within an image. The analysis of these images was carried out in the 'description' phase, and thus possible interpretations were given but without attempting to provide a unique answer.

The textual analysis mainly looked at the semantic area of the skin in two sub-groups: healthy skin and diseased skin. The assumption is that words are imprints left on the society that convey different meanings.[15] Therefore great stress was put on how recurrent expressions and propositions about skin created different stories for different

[13] Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past. Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.19.
[14] Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt, *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (London: Sage, 2001), p.14-15.
[15] John E. Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers. An approach From Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Palgrave, 2007), p.47.

purposes. We will definitely see that talking about healthy skin and diseased skin were part of different newspapers' agendas. The second assumption is that news is a representation of the world in language.[16] Therefore, studying and interpreting that language provides access to the Victorian world. The human body in particular was of crucial importance in the development of metaphors in English and other Western languages and cultures.[17] In fact, the aspects of the language with which this thesis is most concerned are rhetorical devices, such as metaphors and metonyms as well as literary tropes. Basically, the qualitative method focused on interpreting the content of newspapers. The aim was to understand the way in which the skin was portrayed in Victorian newspapers and to question the absence of its coverage where one would have expected to find it.

To sum up, the results discussed in all of the chapters were obtained digitally using The Times Gale Cengage Archive, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The Illustrated London News Archive and the nineteenth-century British Library newspaper archive. At times, where it is stated, hard copies of newspapers were consulted in order to double-check information or to browse newspapers that have not been digitized. The method involved isolating the words researched and analysing the text focusing on the particular 'word' in its context. This made it possible to map out the usage of the word skin in Victorian newspapers between 1840 and 1899.

The results in chapter three were obtained by conducting a key-word search using: 'skin' and 'complexion'. Since the purpose of this first chapter was to provide an overview of how skin was used in the newspapers, the method mainly involved

[16] Roger Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.4.
[17] Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor. A Practical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.18.

identifying the context of the key-words mainly advertisements and public health columns. The results in chapter four were obtained by inserting the word ‘skin’ into the Times Gale Cengage Archive. When the archive revealed that the majority of hits corresponded to 1846, the research was restricted to that year only. Close reading of the text revealed that the word skin was frequently employed in relation to an inquest into flogging in the army took place that year. Then the word ‘flogging’ was added into the keyword based search to see how skin was discussed within the context of the campaign to abolish flogging in the army.

The results in chapter five were obtained by inserting the word ‘skin’ as a key-word initially. Again the number of hits led to a focus on the 1860s and close reading of the text demonstrated that those years saw two big inquests related to bedsores. Then the expression ‘bedsore/s’ was searched in the digital archives to see the context in which it was deployed: mainly the campaign against the New Poor Law.

The premises of chapter six are connected with the history of occupational skin diseases, in particular miners and chimney sweeps. The choice of these was dictated by the fact that investigations took place in the 1840s into the employment of children, which highlighted the problems of these two specific professions. Inserting the word ‘skin’ did not produce the same results as in the previous chapters. Therefore the search was made more flexible by alternating terms such as ‘wound/s’ ‘burns’. However the results were not as productive as the former and therefore the question focused on the lack of reportage of occupational skin disease.

The stories retrieved through the digital archives have been deconstructed and re-constructed to highlight the points where skin was presented. The reconstruction does

not follow a chronological order but uses a thematic approach whereby situations that are distant chronologically are associated because they are close thematically.

Chapter 3. Skin in Print

The aim of this chapter is to provide the cultural context against which an understanding of human skin developed in the Victorian collective imagination. This section gives an overview of some of the most recurrent ways of framing human skin not only in Victorian newspapers but also in the popular medical literature from which the lay press drew extensively. It will show the very first results obtained by inserting the word 'skin' into the search engine of the nineteenth-century British newspapers' digital archives between 1840 and 1900.

The results discussed in this chapter have been obtained by searching the word 'skin' in the entire document and as a key-word in the newspapers digital archives: The Times Gale Cengage archive, The 19th British Library Newspapers Database, ProQuest Newspapers and the Illustrated London News Archive. The items presented in this chapter have been selected according to two main criteria: the word skin had to be accompanied by the use of visuals and it had to contain information about skin as a human organ. The purpose is to provide with a comprehensive map of how skin appeared in press to Victorian newspapers' readers.

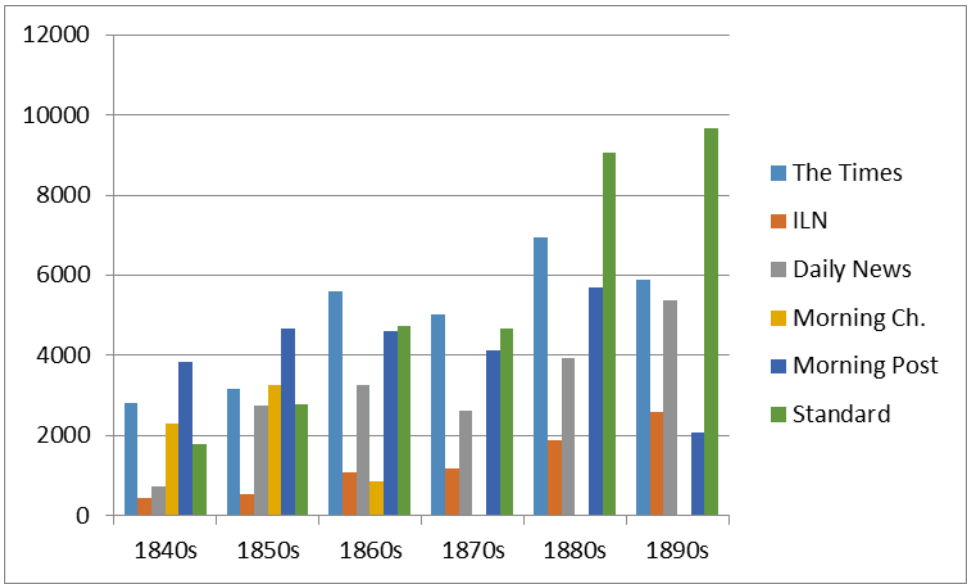


Chart 3.1 Full text search for 'skin' in six London-based newspapers.

The chart above shows an increase in the usage of the word 'skin' in all newspapers with the exception of the *Morning Chronicle*, which ended its publications in 1865. *The Times* records the highest number of occurrences in the pre-abolishment taxes period. This search includes advertisements and the later prominence of the *Morning Post* and the *Standard* is due to the heavy presence of advertisements about skin products. Counting how many times 'skin' was there in a non-commercial context cannot be done digitally. Advertisements were not only present on the front page but were also embedded in the text everywhere in a single newspaper; the software does not always make this distinction. However, with the digital archive it is possible to select the option 'key-word' and exclude most of the advertisements. The following chart (3.2) shows how the results change.

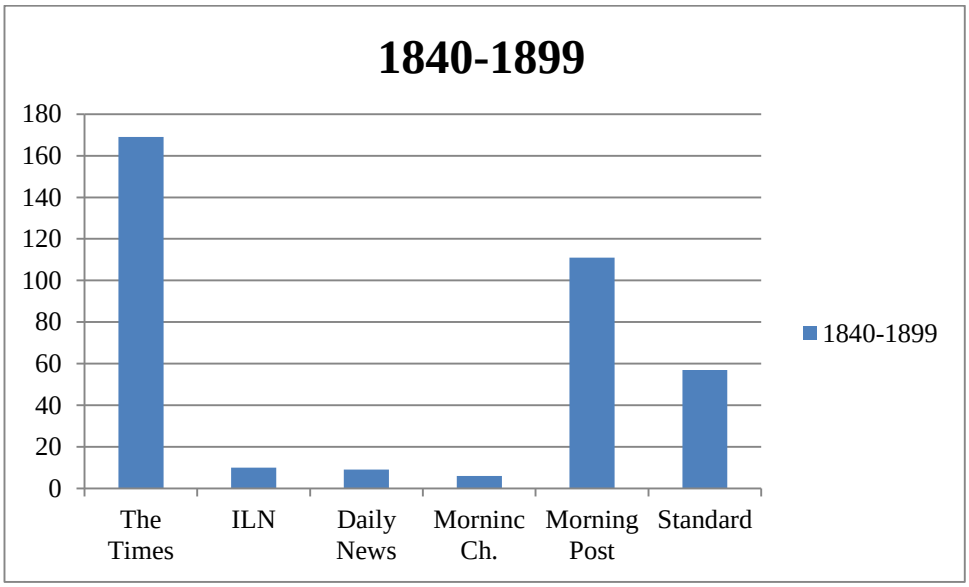


Chart 3.2 Text search for 'skin' in six London-based newspapers – key-word only, excluding advertisements.

This chart illustrates the prominence of skin as a key-word in *The Times*, meaning that its presence is recorded in titles and as a main subject by the software and does not include the section advertisements.

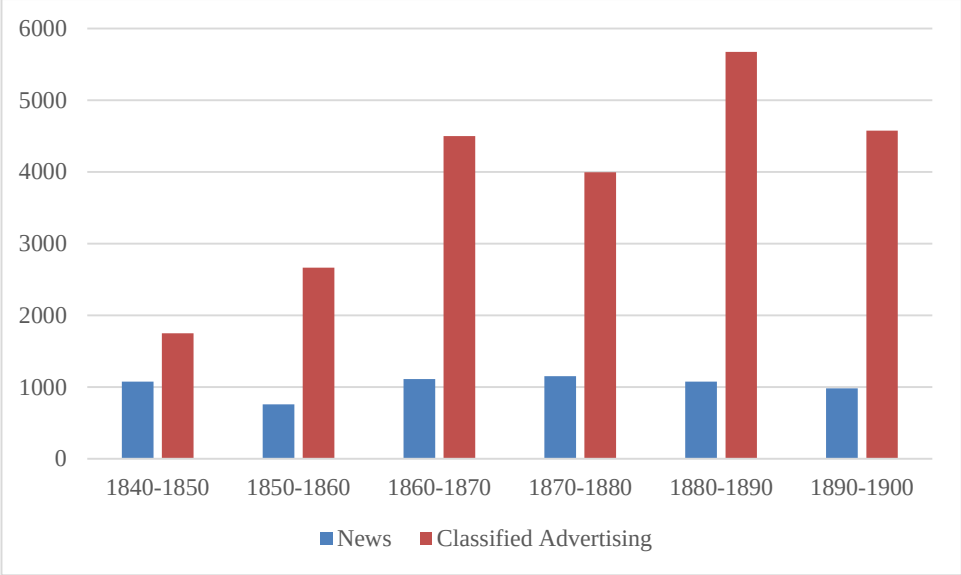


Chart 3.3 Full text search for "skin" in *The Times* 1840-1900

The usage of the word 'skin' in *The Times* in the news section slightly decreased after the 1840s. The use of the word 'skin' in advertisements markedly increased after the 1850s.

Both forms of popularization of the understanding of the skin, advertisements and health-related news, sometimes worked in a complementary way and on other occasions in a contradictory mode. While during the first half of the century some newspapers publishers tried to exercise a degree of influence over what was advertised, in particular medical advertising, during the second half and last decades of the century publishers admitted that they could not check every advertisement submitted and left up to the readers to question the advertisement's content.[1] Skin product advertisements revolved around three recurring themes: the importance of beauty in society; clean skin as a signifier of civilization and clean skin as a precaution against contagious diseases. This chapter will demonstrate that the coverage of skin in Victorian newspapers simultaneously served three main purposes. The first was commercial, which could be seen from the apparent boom in skin product advertisements that filled newspaper columns in the second half of the nineteenth century. The second was epistemological

[1] Terry R. Nevett, *Advertising in Britain. A History* (London: Heiemann, 1982), p.120-21.

as newspapers became a medium for the popularization of an understanding of the skin's properties and characteristics. The third was socio-political as the promotion of skin cleanliness became a key issue in the sanitation reform pioneered in Britain in the Victorian age.

By the second half of the nineteenth century it was known that the skin was characterized by at least two distinctive sections: the *epidermis* and the inner layer, called the *cutis vera*. Famous soap-maker Francis Pears, in a popular book about dermatology published in 1859, explained that: 'The outward or surface skin is called the scarf skin- the anatomical name of this skin is the epidermis. The under or second skin is called the cutis or true skin; it is also named the cutis vera'.[2] Nonetheless, the popular notion of skin as just an external layer, not even an organ, was hard to challenge. The very first definition of skin given by nineteenth-century dictionaries was 'an external membrane or envelope covering the body'.[3] This is not that different from today's *Oxford English Dictionary*'s entry: 'a natural external covering or integument of an animal removed from the body'.[4] Victorian newspapers tended to break down the definition into two parts, which shaped two different stories: one was the skin just as the *epidermis*, the outermost layer; the second was the skin as *dermis*, the section lying immediately under the *epidermis* containing vessels and nerves. The two types of explanation given in the Victorian press were that the skin is a flat surface and therefore can be treated for curative or aesthetic purposes externally or, that the skin is a porous organ with an in-depth structure and any condition must be addressed while considering the implications for the other organs. The following examples show the coexistence of

[2] Francis Pears, *Skin, Baths, & Soap* (London: Pears, 1859), p.2.
[3] John Ogilvie, *The Imperial Dictionary* (London: Blackie and Son,1851); Noah Webster *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (London: George Bell, 1883); William A. N. Dorland, *The Illustrated Medical Dictionary* (London: Saunders, 1901).
[4] "skin, n.". OED Online. September 2014. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180922?rskey=ArTumr&result=1 (accessed November 17, 2014).

two images of skin in the Victorian period. These two notions can be visualized either as a diagrammatic sectional view (Fig. 3.1), where the skin clearly looks to be a multi-layered organ or as in one of the most typical examples of soap advertisements, which is a portrait of an angel-like woman's face, used in an advertisement for Cuticura soap (Fig. 3.2). The former represents a method of analysis developed following the application of microscopy to human anatomy. The latter is an engraving portraying the pale, flawless skin of a young woman. This was

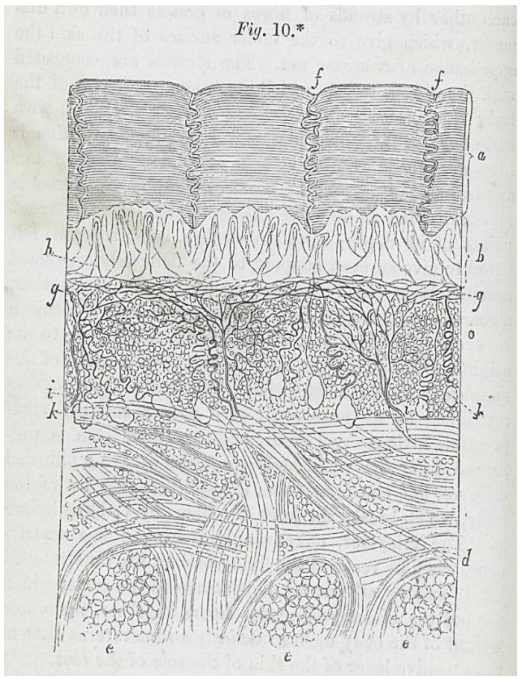


Figure 3.1 A section of the skin of the palm of the hand in Erasmus Wilson, *Healthy Skin* (1855), p.24.

Figure 3.2 Soap advertisement for Cuticura in the *Graphic*, 10 March 1888.

meant to be an ideal of Victorian beauty: the angel of the hearth. The articles retrieved from the newspapers' digital collections did not show any examples of a histological view of the skin while these abounded in professional medical and popular books. However, the lack of skin diagrams in the newspapers was compensated by the publications of human anatomy lectures, which put into words what is shown in the diagram. On the other hand, the portrait of the angel-like woman was a recurrent feature in illustrated or popular newspapers' advertising sections. The two images confirm that,

as Helena Michie argued, the interpretation of the skin for the Victorians was at the border between science and beauty and, mostly, skin exemplified the science of beauty.[5] The linguistic register, between science and the philosophy of beauty, emerged in the popular literature of the time about skin care.

Beauty is only skin-deep

The simultaneous growth of professional and popular science in the Victorian period created a reciprocated space of influence: there were experts pursuing specializations, and writers and lecturers that translated technical language into more captivating terms and spoke to the increasing mass readership.[6] Into the category of those writers, whom Bernard Lightman defined 'popularizers' due to their role in presenting new views on nature and society extracted from empirical science, fall the authors of books about beauty and cleanliness that proliferated in the mid-Victorian years, in particular among a female readership. Their arguments reverberated in the newspapers, capturing a section of the audience that was under-represented in the news columns. It is worth briefly discussing the content of these publications because they were widely advertised in newspapers and often their extracts were reprinted *verbatim*. Basically, they constitute the cultural background against which the newspapers operated.

One of the earliest nineteenth-century examples of popular skin care publications is the *Art of Beauty*, which appeared in 1825 as a handbook containing 'useful' and 'practical knowledge' regarding preserving and improving complexion. It also comprised a

[5] Helena Michie, 'Under Victorian Skins: the bodies beneath', in Herbert F. Tucker (ed.), *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (Malden: Blackwell, 1999), p.408.
[6] Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science. Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 6 and 495.

brief philosophical history of beauty. The title echoes Latin poet Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* 'The Art of Love' and in fact the underlying message of this anonymous text is that without acknowledging the art of beauty one can be prevented from being loved. Besides, Ovid was also the author of one of the first didactic treatises on cosmetics: *Medicamina Faciei Femineae* 'Women's Facial Cosmetics'. The *Art of Beauty*, whose declared plain and simple language and simplistic argumentation suggest that it was addressed to non-medical readers, implied that the ideal skin should be free of any signs or marks that are usually indicators of irregular living. A scar on the neck of a woman might dissuade a man from approaching her: '[…] and thus a fine young woman may, by such scars, be doomed to perpetual celibacy'. Furthermore, it says: 'The complexion which is considered the most beautiful is a pale carnation, in which neither the white nor the red can be said to predominate'.[7] William Cobbett is a name usually associated with his political commentary questioning the government. He regularly published acrimonious pieces in his radical periodical *Political Register* (1802-1835) on matters such as flogging in the army and reforms for farm labourers. Less known is his *Advice to a Lover* in which he defined cleanliness as: 'a capital ingredient; for there never yet was, and there never will be, love of any long duration, sincere and ardent love, in any man towards a filthy mate […] The signs of cleanliness are, in the first place, a clean skin'.[8] Famous Victorian criminal and beauty salon owner Madame Rachel, used to say that 'a slight blemish on the face, otherwise divinely beautiful, has occasioned a sad and solitary life of celibacy'.[9]

The *Penny Illustrated Paper*, a cheap newspaper founded in 1861, was famous for its display of violence, sensationalistic reporting and fictional stories. The 'World of

[7] *The Art of Beauty* (London: Knight and Lacey, 1825), p.104.
[8] William Cobbett, *Advice to a Lover* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937), pp.33-34.
[9] John Woodforde, *The History of Vanity* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1995), p.56.

Women' was a page of the *Penny Illustrated Paper* that ran systematically and was dedicated to female readers. The 'World of Women' was meant to address a variety of subjects from housekeeping to dress, and from beauty tips to behaviour in society. The column bears the signature of 'Marguerite' and this is all that is known about the author. 'What can my inside have to do with my complexion?' wonders one of the protagonists of her column. 'Marguerite' draws attention to the fact that many women do not acknowledge the importance of the 'inside' for the beauty of their complexion. This idea of 'inside' is exemplified by a series of variables affecting one's skin. These are: heritage, as bad skin may be inherited from the grandmother (note: not from the grandfather), 'a struggle for existence', which today we would call stress; bad nutrition, an inclination for sweets; marriage failure and poor income, which affects nutrition.[10]

Toilet and Cosmetic Arts in Ancient and Modern Times (1866) was a later popular Victorian book about the skin, which combined suggestions for the care of the complexion with historical references to the theory of beauty. The author was English beauty writer Arnold Cooley, who underlined the rhetorical value of the skin, stating that: 'A pleasing appearance is said to be 'the first letter of recommendation'.[11] According to Cooley, human features show the connection between the outside and inside, as they are impressions produced by the mind leaving their signs on the skin. Here we see an interpretation of the connection between the surface and depth but not one that provides an anatomical understanding of the human body. What was missing was the connection between the external and internal organs; instead the focus was on making assumptions regarding appearance and ethical conduct by using a metaphor

[10] *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 14 September 1889, p.250.
[11] Arnold Cooley, *The Toilet and Cosmetic Arts in Ancient and Modern Times* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1866), p.1.

about the ‘outside’ and the ‘inside’. Therefore a bad temper might result in external ugliness whereas a good temper might make the features smooth and even. Those features were, according to Cooley, an invaluable condition to be considered fit for the social circle and society.[12] Similarly to *The Art of Beauty*, Cooley identified eruptions on the forehead as a symptom of a constitutional disorder, as if they were indicators of some sort of vice, described as the brand of Cain. Cooley called them a mark of the violation of laws.[13]

The quality of the complexion was also often associated with nationalistic sentiments: ‘The British have been for centuries famed for beauty of COMPLEXION [sic]’ says the anonymous author of *Beauty, what it is and how to retain it* (1873).[14] American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his work on English traits, remembered his travels in Britain and that the English face is characterized by a fair complexion, blue eyes, and an open and florid aspect.[15] Ludmilla Jordanova has argued that the tendency to infer behaviour and character from external appearance has always been part of the Western culture but has developed through time in different modes. Traditionally, the correlation between inside and outside implied the existence of God in nature.

> Frankenstein's monster is ugly because he was produced by man and constructed by illegitimate means. His ugliness denotes the violation of the distinction between creation and production that led to his existence. The beauty of nature, by contrast, is not just the sign of God's superior handiwork; it also serves as a constant reminder of the aptness of God's intelligence in fitting form so perfectly with function. Beauty and adaptation are two sides of the same coin - creation. The discrepancy

[12] Ibid., p.209.
[13] Ibid., p.289.
[14] (By a Lady), *Beauty what it is and how to retain it* (London: Frederick Warne and co., 1873), p.67.
[15] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits* (Boston: Philips, Samson and Company, 1856).

> between God's work and human production is visually registered both in terms of aesthetic quality and in terms of functional fit.[16]

The aforementioned book written by Pears confirms this idea of intact beauty as a form of a state of harmony with nature:

> Complexion is the great charm of woman, when the complexion is what nature intends it to be. We gaze with delight on the tiger and the snake, and forget their natures in admiration of the glossy and burnished dress they wear-then how much more are men enchanted when to the sweetness of woman is added the radiance of hue which a smooth and healthy skin alone imparts.[17]

Ancient philosophy's attempts to make sense of beauty demonstrate that the problem of categorizing external appearance as having a connection with a divine gift has always been a human concern. Aileen Ribeiro claimed that the Victorians' admiration for the art and culture of ancient Greece might have included a willingness to return to the Platonic idea of beauty as an indicator of virtue.[18] It is not by chance that Victorian beauty advertisements contain strong references to the classical world, as we will see shortly.

Greek poetess Sappho used the image of the full moon as a metaphor for beauty precisely because it is complete. Beauty therefore coincided with a condition in which there is nothing missing. The implication of this idea is that beauty is not subjective because, objectively, everyone can recognize what is intact, and therefore beautiful.[19] From these points of view diseased or wounded skin cannot be beautiful

[16] Ludmilla Jordanova, *Nature Displayed. Gender, Science and Medicine 1760-1820* (London: Longman, 1999), p.65.
[17] Pears (1859), op. cit., p.1.
[18] Aileen Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty: Painted Women and Cosmetic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p.226.
[19] Umberto Curi, 'Sul Concetto di Bellezza', in Valerio Neri (ed.), *Il Corpo e lo Sguardo. Tredici Studi sulla Visualità e Bellezza del Corpo nella Cultura Antica* (Bologna: Patron Editore, 2005), p.7.

because its limits have been broken. Broken skin can generate disgust, as was stated in 1884 by Alfred J. Neale. He was a physician at the Manchester Skin Hospital who published a pamphlet entitled *Facts about the Skin*, which was partially reprinted by the weekly *Manchester Times*.

> While chronic disease may and does attack internal organs without causing much discomfort to the sufferer, it [skin] cannot appear on the surface of the body without proclaiming its presence to all the world and bringing down on its unhappy possessor remarks which, however sympathetic, cannot be other than unpleasant. Indeed, the sympathy with which a skin disease is regarded is, in many people, largely mingled with disgust.[20]

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in *Discourse sur l'origine de l'inegalite*, suggested that a significant shift in the history of the human race is when people see themselves through the eyes of others, whereby a tension is created by self-perception and the judgments of others.[21] What has granted the endurance of physiognomy through the centuries is its flexibility, an elasticity that has permitted it to remain in different settings and environments and with different names.[22] From the mid nineteenth-century not only faces but also facial expressions (pathognomy), lines on the forehead (metoscopy), lines on the hand (chiromancy and chirognomy), and moles (neomancy) were employed to decipher social types and different characters.[23]

Here is an example of the linkage between skin and value, provided by a letter that appeared in *The Times*, which was sent in response to a pamphlet describing

[20] A. J. Neale, *Facts about the Skin* (London: John Heywood, 1884), p.5.
[21] Cited in Jordanova (1999), op. cit., p.65.
[22] Sharrona Pearl, *About Faces. Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. (London: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.213.
[23] Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.14.

women as physically, intellectually and morally inferior to men. The letter, which has an indignant tone, calls on a connection between skin and phrenology to give a counter argument to M. Delaunay, the author of the pamphlet. 'Phrenologists assert that a fine texture of brain is usually combined with a fine skin, soft hair and delicacy of form, all of which are conspicuous in woman'.[24] As we can see, in this case fine skin was not only considered a sign of female beauty; it was also seen as an indicator of intelligence and culture.

'The Ethics of the Skin' is an article printed by the *Standard*, a conservative evening daily. It devoted two articles to a lecture delivered by Malcom Morris, a surgeon at the skin department at St. Mary's Hospital, on the occasion of the International Health exhibition. The same piece then appeared in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, which copied the *Standard's* version. The lecturer explained how the skin encapsulates one's individuality by revealing in its signs the health of the person. 'The colour of the skin is a test of health,' declared Morris at the lecture.[25] Under discussion was the new fashion for displaying pale faces, both in art and fashion. Morris was referring in particular to an artistic movement that portrays subjects looking like convalescents, women with an 'etherealised skin' and subjects with a decaying appearance. So it is not clear whether he was making a parallel between contemporary art and the use of cosmetics (whiteners) or whether he was only sarcastically referring to people who paint their faces as looking like the protagonists of paintings created by artists with dubious taste. The article terminates by hoping that the fashion will change and calling for a time when it will be fashionable to be healthy and have natural skin. The problem raised by Morris is important in determining the Victorian ideal of beauty

[24] *The Times*, 28 September 1881, p.6.
[25] *Standard*, 20 June 1884, p.5.

because wearing make-up contradicts the long-standing idea of beauty as being close to nature, as created by God. Victorian advertisements for beauty products show this apparent contradiction. On the one hand we have advertisements promoting skin whose beauty and cleanliness could be attained by using soap. On the other hand, more towards the end of the century, there were advertisements endorsing the use of make-up, such as face powders, as a means to have a beautiful complexion.

Clean skin in advertisements

The initial research using the term 'skin' in the digital historical archives showed that it was in the classified advertising section that the word 'skin' occurred most. The quantitative relevance of the hits should not be overstated because, although numerous, the adverts were almost always the same; they repeated the same concepts, with similar phrasing and similar images. However, they demonstrate regular instances of how the skin was visualized in the newspapers. Advertisements are the only places in the newspapers where we can see a systematic visual representation of human skin, and sometimes skin diseases. By using 'skin' as a keyword, between the years 1840-1900, the 19th century British Newspapers archive returned 462,459 results in the advertising section against 329,467 in the news section. During the same period, The Times Gale Cengage printed the word 'skin' 21,214 times in advertisements and 5,719 times in the news.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the dissemination of a medical and scientific understanding of the skin was accompanied by strongly normative visual language regarding clean skin, the main visual referent, in particular for soap

advertisements.[26] According to the Excise returns, by 1851 the average production of soap in England was 537 tons per annum as the demand for soap was significantly augmented as the result of the rapid growth in population: consumption per head increased from 3.6lb in 1801 to 7.1 lb in 1851.[27] By 1891individual soap consumption had risen to 15.4lb.[28] Newspapers and magazines were the most effective way of disseminating advertisements and the press' contribution to the development of commodity culture was massive; moreover, even before the abolition of the advertisement tax in 1853, the advertising industry was already a key part of newspapers' revenue.[29] Pears and Cuticura were large soap manufacturers that were renowned for investing resources in their expensive slogans. Thomas Barratt, the Pears chairman, is considered the father of modern advertising. He revolutionized the brand's distribution by creating highly artistic and original publicity campaigns and hiring physicians and dermatologists, such as famous British dermatologist Erasmus Wilson, to speak in support of their products.[30] *The Times* used to commemorate the arrival of newly born children by mentioning them in its columns and sending them a complimentary soap and pictorial advertising leaflet courtesy of Barratt.[31]

Cuticura was the name of an antibacterial soap manufactured by an American company called Potter Drug & Chemical, which commenced international advertising in 1886. Cuticura's advertisements lacked the visual impact of its competitor brand Pears. Most studies on Victorian soap advertisements have focused on Pears' products and

[26] Mieneke te Hennepe, *Depicting the skin. Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Medicine*, PhD dissertation, (University of Maastricht, 2007), p.89.
[27] Albert E. Musson, *Enterprise in Soap and Chemicals* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), p. 22.
[28] Charles Wilson, *The History of Unilever. A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change* (London: Cassell, 1970), p.9.
[29] Andrew King, "Advertising" in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (London: Academia Press, 2009), p.7.
[30] Michael Dempsey (ed.), *Bubbles. Early Advertising Art from A. & F. Pears Ltd* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1978), p.3.
[31] Ibid.

neglected Cuticura. There are several possible reasons for this. It is most probably because Pears was much older than Cuticura, as the company was founded in 1807, while Cuticura's first soap was put in circulation in 1865. Moreover, Pears' advertisements had a greater visual impact: the images were more refined and rich with cultural connotations. 'Bubbles', Pears' most famous advertisement, was painted by English artist and founder of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, John Everett Millais.[32] This section of the thesis will look mainly at advertisements for Cuticura soap. The fact that the adverts do not show the level of artistic sophistication of the Pears campaigns does not make them less interesting to the study of both the history of art and the history of press advertising. The analysis of Cuticura advertisements will be followed by a brief excursion into cosmetics advertisements in order to compare the two different trends: cleaning the face and painting the face. As you will see, all of the advertisements reproduced are from the 1880s and 1890s. It was in fact in the second half of the nineteenth century that there was a boom in the advertising industry; the last four decades have been defined as the 'golden age' for advertising.[33] New professions such as advertising agents, copy-editors of press directories and designers of images and slogans for branded goods started to emerge during that period.[34] The skin product advertisements to be analysed in this thesis have mainly been selected from the two most prominent large-scale highly illustrated newspapers, the *Illustrated London News* (ILN) and the *Graphic.* The *ILN* was a weekly founded in 1842 and aimed at the middle class; it was the first illustrated newspaper in the world. The *Graphic*, founded in 1869 by former *ILN* contributors, was more expensive but had higher technical quality. A further peculiarity of Graphic was that among its founders and staff

[32] For an analysis of soap advertising between 1800 and 1900 see Mieneke te Hennepe, 'To Preserve the Skin in Health', *Medical History* 58:3 (2014).
[33] Andrew King "Advertising" Brake and Demoor (eds.) (2009), op. cit., p.5.
[34] Ibid.

there was a female illustrator called Helen Allingham; she was the only woman employed by the paper.[35] Allingham, daughter of a medical practitioner and related through her mother to the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, was a periodical illustrator and watercolour painter. She came to prominence between 1870 and 1874 when she captured the attention of *Graphic* readers due to her 'vigorous drawing and excellent composition'.[36]

The idea of visible beauty has always been closely associated with skin care, and also with cosmetics and medicine, because everything linked to appearance is temporary; skin products, cosmetics and dermatology are the fields where the answer to the human desire to preserve external beauty finds fulfilment, although temporary in itself.[37] 'That soap creates beauty is beyond doubt,' suggested a piece published by the *ILN*, reprinted from miscellaneous monthly magazine *Harper's Bazaar*. According to the piece, which celebrates the efficacy of soap and water for preserving a beautiful complexion, soap became popular in England after Philip Augustustus received a present from Sultan Saladin consisting of a few hundred soap cakes. He then gave these to the queen who distributed them to the court on gold salvers and since then soap has been popular. The ready availability of soaps would have ensured perfect skin for English women, and 'hence, their smooth skin and unrivalled luxuriance and texture of hair skin the envy for other nations [sic]'.[38]

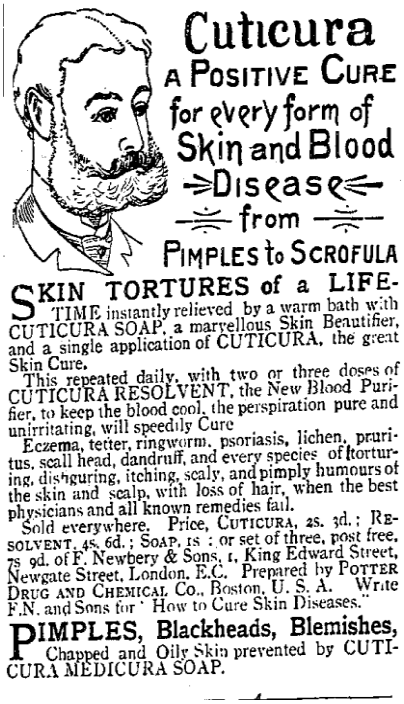
'A Skin without Blemish' (Fig. 3.2) constitutes the most emblematic example of the advertisements for Cuticura Soap because it was one of the most iconic images for skin products.

[35] Cheryl Law, "Allingham, Helen Mary Elizabeth" (*DJN* 2009), op. cit., p.12.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Stella Fatović-Ferenčić and Marija-Ana Dürrigl, 'Beauty: Soul or Surface', *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology* 2:2 (2003), p.83.
[38] *ILN*, 25 July 1885.

The example shown here is the angel-like pale face of a young woman. Some variants of this type of advertisement might have included a man with a moustache and beard or a woman holding a baby in her arms. There are variants of the text, but the main message remains the same: a skin without blemish is what everybody should aim for as it implies beauty, health and social integration. The presentation of the product advertised was usually followed by a fictitious letter from someone with a first-hand account of his experience with a skin problem and how Cuticura had solved it. In this particular case it is a man who is writing; he has been married to a woman who had eczema for two years before she found a remedy in Cuticura soap. The man says that he is particularly pleased about finding the remedy because this skin condition had impaired his and his wife's existence to the point that she was no longer able to walk and 'attend to her regular duties as lady of the house'.[39] The man's account at once lends authority to the statement and the desirability from the woman's perspective regarding how she, as a consumer of Cuticura, might have wished to have been seen by the male sex. The following examples (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4) are advertisements for Cuticura soap, which was meant to cure a wide variety of skin conditions. Both versions

[39] *Graphic*, 25 August 1888.

of this advert, which suggest the use of the soap to cure eczema, communicate



Cuticura
A POSITIVE CURE
for every form of
Skin and Blood
Disease
from
PIMPLES to SCROFULA

SKIN TORTURES of a LIFE-TIME instantly relieved by a warm bath with CUTICURA SOAP, a marvellous Skin Beautifier, and a single application of CUTICURA, the great Skin Cure.

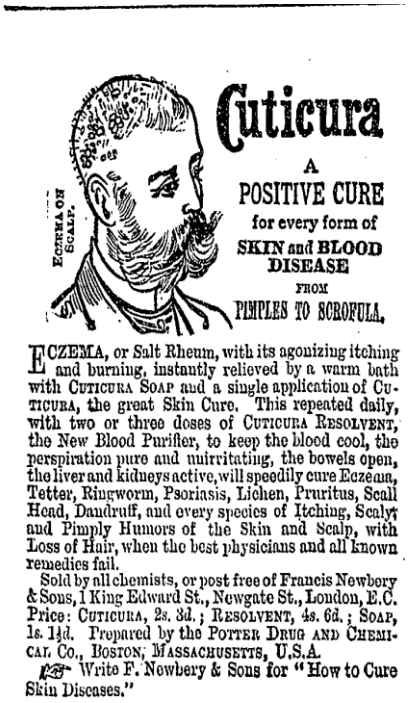
This repeated daily, with two or three doses of CUTICURA RESOLVENT, the New Blood Purifier, to keep the blood cool, the perspiration pure and unirritating, will speedily Cure

Eczema, tetter, ringworm, psoriasis, lichen, pruritus, scall head, dandruff, and every species of torturing, disfiguring, itching, scaly, and pimply humours of the skin and scalp, with loss of hair, when the best physicians and all known remedies fail.

Sold everywhere. Price, CUTICURA, 2s. 3d.; RESOLVENT, 4s. 6d.; SOAP, 1s.; or set of three, post free, 7s 9d. of F. Newbery & Sons, 1, King Edward Street, Newgate Street, London, E.C. Prepared by POTTER DRUG AND CHEMICAL Co., Boston, U. S. A. Write F.N. and Sons for "How to Cure Skin Diseases."

PIMPLES, Blackheads, Blemishes, Chapped and Oily Skin prevented by CUTICURA MEDICURA SOAP.

Figure 3.3 *Graphic* 29 January 1887.



ECZEMA OR SCALL.

Cuticura
A
POSITIVE CURE
for every form of
SKIN and BLOOD
DISEASE
FROM
PIMPLES TO SCROFULA.

ECZEMA, or Salt Rheum, with its agonizing itching and burning, instantly relieved by a warm bath with CUTICURA SOAP and a single application of CUTICURA, the great Skin Cure. This repeated daily, with two or three doses of CUTICURA RESOLVENT, the New Blood Purifier, to keep the blood cool, the perspiration pure and unirritating, the bowels open, the liver and kidneys active, will speedily cure Eczema, Tetter, Ringworm, Psoriasis, Lichen, Pruritus, Scall Head, Dandruff, and every species of Itching, Scaly, and Pimply Humors of the Skin and Scalp, with Loss of Hair, when the best physicians and all known remedies fail.

Sold by all chemists, or post free of Francis Newbery & Sons, 1 King Edward St., Newgate St., London, E.C. Price: CUTICURA, 2s. 3d.; RESOLVENT, 4s. 6d.; SOAP, 1s. 1½d. Prepared by the POTTER DRUG AND CHEMICAL Co., BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, U.S.A.

☞ Write F. Newbery & Sons for "How to Cure Skin Diseases."

Figure 3.4 *Preston Guardian* 11 April 1885.

potentially misleading information. Broken skin is more prone to infections, and the rubbing of creams or other products onto the surface might spread the infectious agents; eczema is also triggered by contact with irritants such as soaps, cosmetics, perfumes and water.[40] This was known in the Victorian period; English dermatologist Erasmus Wilson, in the columns of the *British Medical Journal* in 1864, explained that eczema is a chronic condition and that its treatment is not simple. Wilson focused on the importance of good nutrition and in term of local treatment he suggested applying a very specific unguent made of zinc oxide. He did not mention the use of common soap as a remedy but he recommended the use of juniper tar soap for forms of eczema squamosum.[41] At the end of the century, physician for diseases of the skin, Frank

[40] Rebecca Fox-Spencer and Tim Mitchell, *Eczema* (Long Hanborough: CSF Medical Communications Ltd, 2006), p.20-24.
[41] Erasmus Wilson, 'On the Nature, the Varieties, and the Treatment of Eczema', *BMJ* 2:203 (1864), p.573.

Barendt, stated that the excessive use of soap and water could provoke an outbreak of eczema.[42]

Another element present in these skin product advertisements is what we could call the 'skin disease list'. This is a rather common feature in skin product advertisements, and it refers to the promotion of a product that apparently can cure a wide-range of skin conditions. Apparently this feature of grouping all skin conditions together, as if they were synonyms, is rooted in ancient medical terminology and the difficulty for physicians of distinguishing between different pathologies. Wilson, in 1864, explained in the *British Medical Journal* that Romans and Greeks assigned to the different varieties of eczema different names and that these different names came to be classified as distinct diseases. Therefore psora, psoriasis, lichens and pityriasis represent different types of eczema. The following quote, extracted from Wilson's article, not only explains the difficulty in classifying skin diseases and how this problem was rooted in times well before the nineteenth century, but it also points out how research in medicine greatly benefited from the development of the press. The efficacy of the printed word was a theme loved by Wilson, as he was a pioneer in the popularization of the knowledge of dermatology through popular books:

> To us, it seems that a greater source of difficulty in the way of scientific investigation, can hardly be conceived, than the appropriation of separate names to simple varieties of one and the same disease; yet, such was the case with regard to eczema; and to this cause we may trace much of the confusion into which cutaneous pathology had fallen at the time of the revival of learning, and on the clearing away of the mists of the dark ages, when learned physicians were called upon to extricate from the ruins of the Greek and the Roman literature, aided chiefly by the translation of Arabian physicians, the descriptions of diseases of

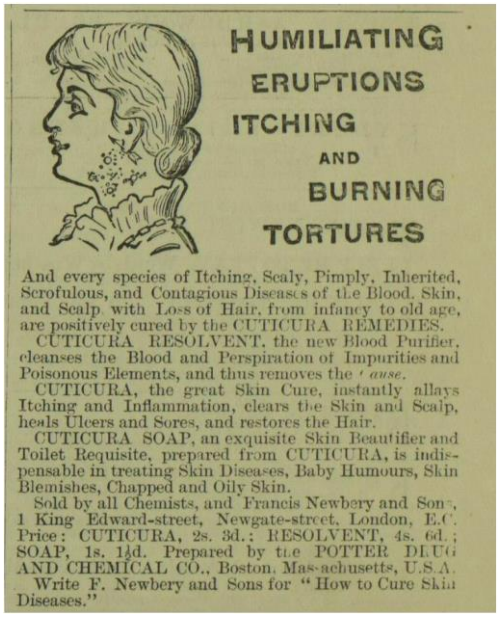
[42] Frank H. Barendt, 'A Discussion on the Question, what are we to understand by eczema?' *BMJ* 2:1967, (1898), p.710.

> which, perchance, the exact parallel had ceased to exist among them, or had ceased to be as common as they were in earlier times; and the difficulties were increased by the absence of that art which has contributed so much to the enlightenment of modern times – the art of printing.[43]

Both versions of this Cuticura advert (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4) tell the reader that these differently named conditions have two things in common. Firstly, they are painful both physically and emotionally; in the former example they are 'torturing' and in the latter they are 'agonizing'. In the second example the 'agonizing' attribute is conveyed by the expression of the bearer who, in contrast to the one appearing in the image that does not show the disruption resulting from eczema, has an expression of misery and prostration. Secondly, they can all be cured by the usage of just one product: Cuticura, defined as 'the great skin cure'. In the second example it is mentioned that the superficial application of Cuticura by keeping the skin pores open might have beneficial effects for other organs such as the bowels and liver. This demonstrates that in the advertisements sometimes the linkage between a superficial organ such as the skin and the other organs of the human body was acknowledged. Nevertheless, the misleading message was that external application of this product could solve internal problems. Today it is known, despite the number of anti-aging creams that are advertised daily in print, on television and online, that although the epidermis bears the marks of time passing, it is in the dermis that new skin cells are produced to renew the external layer. A final observation concerns the drawing itself. In the first case Cuticura is advertised using an image of healthy skin- basically how the skin would look after using the product. In the second the image presents a disruption; the picture shows a skin problem, in this case eczema

[43] Wilson (1864), op. cit., p.567.

on a man's scalp, which causes his hair to fall out. The image with the disrupted skin never appeared in the *Graphic*. It appeared in other papers, such as this example from the *Preston Guardian*, a weekly addressed to the farming industry. However, the second image occurred less frequently than its 'positive' counterpart; it was an exception to the rule. This is important because it is one of the few instances of an image of skin disease published in a newspaper. Skin disease plates were extremely popular in professional books about dermatology and in human anatomy museums but they were not reproduced in newspaper engravings. A further instance is in this extract from the *ILN* (Fig. 3.5), displaying an actual skin ailment. As for the preceding example in the *Graphic*, the message here is that having a skin condition is humiliating and torturing. The text includes as usual the skin disease list and explains how Cuticura can solve all of the problems listed. This example can be contrasted with two different advertisements for the same product published in the *Graphic* a decade later.


HUMILIATING
ERUPTIONS
ITCHING
AND
BURNING
TORTURES

And every species of Itching, Scaly, Pimply, Inherited, Scrofulous, and Contagious Diseases of the Blood, Skin, and Scalp with Loss of Hair, from infancy to old age, are positively cured by the CUTICURA REMEDIES.

CUTICURA RESOLVENT, the new Blood Purifier, cleanses the Blood and Perspiration of Impurities and Poisonous Elements, and thus removes the *Cause*.

CUTICURA, the great Skin Cure, instantly allays Itching and Inflammation, clears the Skin and Scalp, heals Ulcers and Sores, and restores the Hair.

CUTICURA SOAP, an exquisite Skin Beautifier and Toilet Requisite, prepared from CUTICURA, is indispensable in treating Skin Diseases, Baby Humours, Skin Blemishes, Chapped and Oily Skin.

Sold by all Chemists, and Francis Newbery and Sons, 1 King Edward-street, Newgate-street, London, E.C. Price: CUTICURA, 2s. 3d.; RESOLVENT, 4s. 6d.; SOAP, 1s. 1½d. Prepared by the POTTER DRUG AND CHEMICAL CO., Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

Write F. Newbery and Sons for "How to Cure Skin Diseases."

Figure 3.5 *ILN*, 4 April 1885

The *Graphic*'s adverts seem to be more inclined to focus on gesture rather than on a detailed portrayal of a skin condition. They try to convey the same feeling of pain, adding the notion of shame associated with the skin condition, through the simplicity of a gesture: hiding the face in the hands. (Figs. 3.6 and 3.7). Both the examples, the *ILN* and the *Graphic*, show a legacy of classical culture. In the *ILN*, there is the unusual use of an earring shaped like an arrow pointing upwards. This would not have been of particular relevance if it were not for the fact that the arrow pointing upwards was not a

common type of Victorian jewellery.[44] It follows that, rather than an accessory, the arrow could be a symbol of the torturous nature of skin diseases; in fact it is placed close to the neck, which is the site where the condition has been depicted. The interest in renewing a classical theme might be an indirect reference to a common literary theme rooted in ancient Greek and Latin poems: the myth of Peleus' arrow.[45] According to the myth this arrow was said to have the dual power of wounding and healing at the same time. The earring could be a symbol of the constant torture of having an arrow sunk into the ear but because its place is close to where the skin condition developed it might be an indicator of being both the source and the cure for the condition. Or perhaps, it could be a reference to the sixteenth and seventeenth-paintings of the Christian martyrdom of San Sebastian.

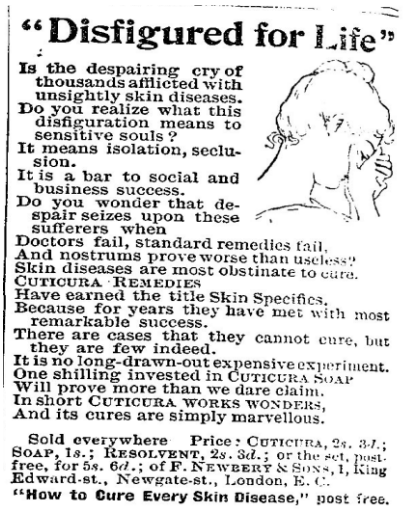


Figure 3.6 *Graphic*, 16 March 1895.

Figure 3.7 *Graphic*, 23 November 1895.

In the examples from the *Graphic* the influence of the classical world is more direct as both of the women portrayed have a hairstyle and clothing that reminds us of the

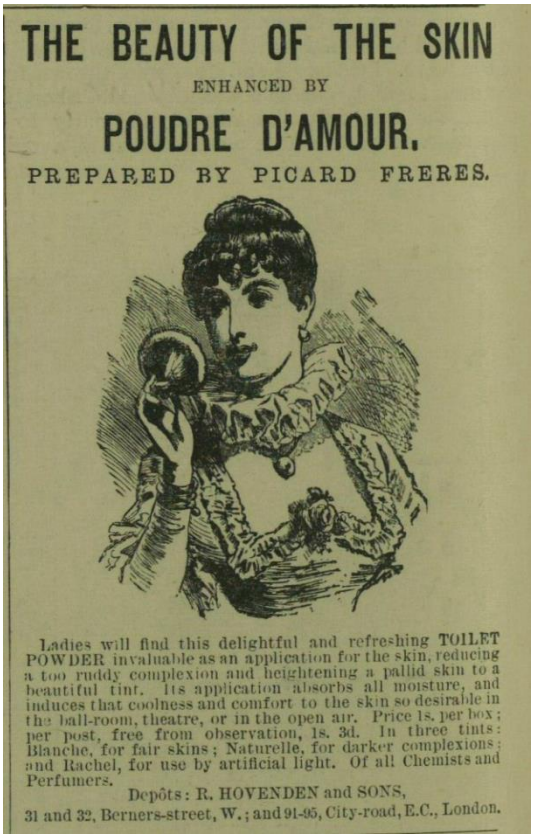
[44] The British Museum holds a few examples of arrows as jewellery but they all point downwards and they are not earrings but hair-pins.
[45] Homer, *Ilias* XIX 387-391; Ovidio, *Remedia Amoris*.

mythological figures that represent beauty in the ancient world: Helen of Troy and *Venus*, who were both subjects of Pre-Raphaelite paintings as well.

A contrasting trend to advertising soap and cleanliness for beautiful skin was to advertise beauty powders not to cure but to conceal skin's imperfections. In the Victorian period there was a debate on the use of cosmetics: on the one hand there was an increasing tendency among women to paint their faces; on the other hand this practice was condemned because it compromised natural beauty. According to John Woodforde, the increase in the use of cosmetics in the twentieth century went hand in hand with the emancipation of women. In the nineteenth century there were strict social rules about cosmetics and their use was hardly accepted, even on stage.[46] Generally speaking, the fashion of the time dictated that the ideal of beauty was a white face for which effect a dash of powder was used. As explained by an article entitled 'Masks and Faces', which appeared in the *ILN* ridiculing the make-up practice, there were three types of white: 'pink white for the fair; yellow white for the dark and white white for those who are weak-minded enough to beflour their faces in emulation of a Clown in a pantomime'. The article, which is a moral critique of the art of painting one's face, a fashion apparently imported from Paris ladies, states with a tone in between sarcasm and polemic, that the trend includes painting fake veins in order to convey transparency, which is 'simply done with a camel-hair brush and a little blue paint' or painting a beauty spot, such as a mole, which would substitute for the older beauty patches.[47] Attaching patches to conceal blemishes is a practice dating back to the seventeenth century; the patches were made of black taffeta and they came in different shapes.[48]

[46] Woodforde (1995), p.54.
[47] *ILN*, 7 June 1856.
[48] Woodforde (1995), op. cit., p.54.

Black patches were also used, by both men and women, to hide pustules caused by syphilis.[49] Figures 3.8 and 3.9 show two very similar examples of advertisements for Poudre D'Amour published in the *ILN* and displaying a curious variant of the use of a black patch.



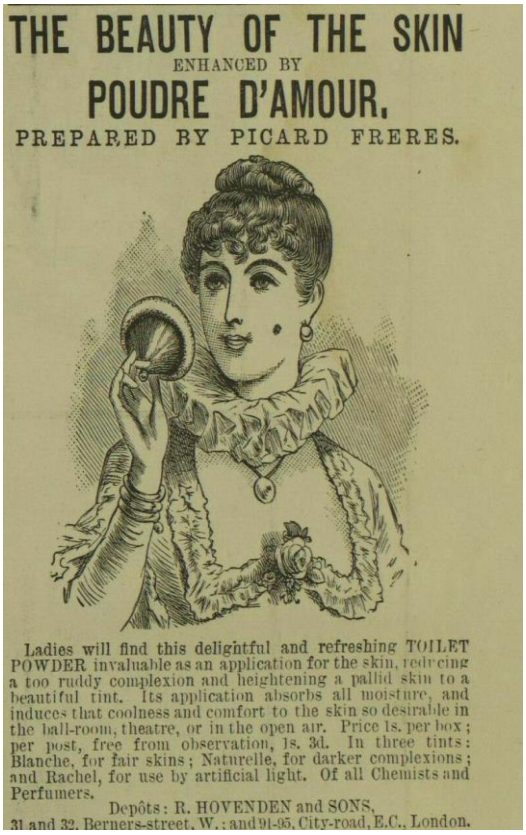


Figure 3.8 and **Figure 3.9** *ILN*, 7 July and 5 May 1888.

The use of patches was particularly fashionable in the seventeenth century as they were used to cover pimples or to imitate the mark of Venus (a mole on the cheek). They were given different names according to the position occupied on the face: if positioned in the middle of the cheek – as in this case – it was called 'finery'.[50] In this advertisement there are two variants of the patch; full circle and absent. The presence or absence of the

[49] Ribeiro (2010), op. cit., p.90.
[50] Sally Pointer, *The Artifice of Beauty. A History and Practical Guide to Perfumes and Cosmetics* (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 2005), p.103.

patch might signify that the canon used in advertisement was very flexible. The main ideas are these of whiteness, purity and cleanliness, but the way of representing them varied according to the contemporary trends. In the *Poudre D' Amour ILN*'s advertisement a mention of Madame Rachel appears: Rachel was the name given to a powder to be used in artificial light. Madame Rachel, whose real name was Sarah Moses, was an English business woman who established a beauty salon in London; one of her most famous preparations was a face powder. In 1868 she was put on trial for fraud; she was accused of blackmailing her clients and exaggerating the efficacy of her preparations. During the trial, Madame Rachel, when accused of fraud, defended her business and advocated her mission to promote the cleanliness of the skin.[51] She presented herself almost as a 'sanitary reformer', touching on a sensitive topic for the times and demonstrating that the border between beauty cosmetics and cleaning products could be blurred. The trial was published in the same papers in which her products were advertised, such as the *ILN*, the *Standard* and the *Morning Post*. It is interesting that *Poudre D' Amour* used the name of a person connected to a crime as a selling point. This is a case where the power of publicity overcame the reality and what stuck in people's minds was the magic power of Madame Rachel, the famous Bond Street Cosmetician, rather than Sarah Rachel Russell who was put on trial and sentenced to imprisonment for fraud and blackmail from 1860-1870.

The types of advertisements displayed in this section contain two different types of conceptions round the skin: the advertisements for soap promoted clean skin and a product that unclogs the pores. The cosmetics advertisements promoted a product that in fact obstructs the pores, as make-up usually does. It was a matter of either cleaning the skin

[51] Helen Rappaport, *Beautiful for Ever: Madame Rachel of Bond-street-Cosmetician, Con-artist and Blackmailer* (London: Vintage Books, 2012), p.67.

or painting it. The expected outcome was the same: the effect of white flawless skin as one of the greatest achievements in a woman's life.

In addition to women, one of the favourite subjects of Victorian skin product advertisements was babies and children for they embodied an ideal of purity conveyed through the softness and whiteness of their skin texture. The last advertisement discussed introduces the next topic of the chapter, which is how the news section of Victorian newspapers popularized the importance of cleanliness of the skin for both physical and moral reasons. The piece, entitled 'The Baby's skin', was published in February 1887 in the *ILN*, with the purpose of promoting Cuticura soap for children. The advert explains that the power of children lies in their tenderness and beauty, which is symbolized in the history of sacred art by the Holy Babe: 'with his limpid gaze, his rosy flesh, his absolute innocence […] in all these instances, the supposition is that the baby is perfect in form and feature, and of the unblemished skin which is the essential charm of babyhood'.[52] This slogan epitomizes the old proverb, 'cleanliness is, indeed, next to Godliness', which was printed in a sermon that was delivered by the founder of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley, in the eighteenth century and which has been widely disseminated since then.[53]

The idea of dirtiness as an indicator of an impure soul dates back to ancient Greek philosophers. Plotinus, from whose speculations early Christian philosophy drew its notions of beauty, believed, apparently in a similar way to the Victorians, in the existence of a connection between ugliness and dirtiness.[54] Therefore, ugliness in humans was seen

[52] *ILN*, 19 February 1887, p.218.
[53] A later version of the sermon: John Wesley, *On Dress* (Oxford: Thomas Cordeux, 1817), p.4.
[54] Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964).

as being due to the presence of alien matter on them: 'The dishonour of the Soul is in its ceasing to be clean and apart. God is degraded when it is mixed with earthy particles'.[55] The same language of ancient philosophy reappeared in Victorian advertisements such as this one: 'Cuticura resolvent, the new blood purifier, cleanses the blood and perspiration of impurities and poisonous elements, and thus removes the cause'.[56] Here we can see clearly an antithesis between purity/impurity where the impurity is the alien matter, the 'poisonous elements' alluded to by Plotinus. It must be pointed out that, according to interpreters of Plotinus' philosophy, the thinker was referring to dirtiness, broadly speaking, in order to draw attention to a widespread human affliction, an impure intellect.[57] Victorian advertisements condensed both pagan and biblical thoughts about cleanliness and godliness into a unique message: beautiful skin - where beautiful means clean- denotes a beautiful soul. The skin is the medium through which one's personality shines through and therefore appearance recounts the life of an individual.

Knowing skin

While looking at skin in advertisements induces us to concentrate on the last decades of the nineteenth century, the dissemination of news about the characteristics of human skin started much earlier through public health columns, lectures and book reviews. These were largely involved with the Victorian sanitation movement. According to Mieneke te Hennepe, during the sanitation movement in Britain the skin became a symbolic surface: a visual moral ideal.[58] It must be remembered that sanitary reform

[55] Plotinus, *Ennead* I, 5-6, 'On the Intellectual Beauty', in Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (eds.) (1964), op. cit., p.146.
[56] *ILN*, 22 August 1885.
[57] Hofstadter and Kuhns (1964), op. cit.
[58] te Hennepe (2014), op. cit., p.398.

went hand in hand with another 'figurative sanitary movement': moral sanitation.[59] However, the examples that we are now going to see are much more dispersed and isolated than the advertisements. They were retrieved using the option 'keyword' in the advanced tool search.[60]

In 1851 the *ILN* acknowledged that there was much misunderstanding regarding what the skin was:

> Only "skin deep", is a common expression, implying that the skin is a matter of slight importance in our physical condition. The observations of modern philosophers, however, have proved that the skin is a most important organ in the human frame, as important as the digestive functions themselves; and that unless it be kept in a clean and vigorous state, the latter may be so overloaded as to become paralysed, leading to endless miserable disorders.[61]

Under the title 'Health and Diseased Skin' the *Morning Chronicle* published a book review of 'The Skin in Health and Disease' by Thomas Innis. The *Morning Chronicle*, founded in 1770, was the most famous morning paper until its absorption by the *Daily Telegraph and Courier* in 1862. It covered parliamentary reports, which were supplemented by news and artistic reviews. The piece starts by acknowledging that there is widespread ignorance about the skin, across all social classes. The necessity to remark on a binary opposition in society is highlighted by these antithetic expressions: well educated/less educated people, and barbarous/civilized. These contrasts are used to make it clear that care of the skin is a problem facing everybody. Although the sanitation movement targeted mainly the working class, ignorance about the functions and properties of the skin was abundantly diffused,

[59] Frank Snowden, Lecture 11. The sanitary movement and the "Filth Theory of Disease", part of Hist-234 Epidemic in Western society since 1600. Open Yale Courses, 17 February 2010. Available at: http://oyc.yale.edu/transcript/604/hist-234 [Accessed 13 April 2013].
[60] For a discussion of the use of the 'keyword' option see p.53.
[61] *ILN*, 16 August 1851.

regardless of education. The book review suggests that the skin is an organ of control. Whereas there are certain diseases that are not preventable, for those that can be avoided the individual is required to exercise self-judgement over his habits, namely: eating, clothing and exercising. The skin therefore reveals the extent to which self-judgement has been applied. The piece also adds: 'It may or may not be within human ability to alter the relation between cause and effect, which has produced the evil. In the latter case there may be means of mitigation, of compromise. Herein lie the functions of the physicians'. The article also promotes the medical profession as custodians of superior knowledge about the human body. It suggests that in order to be able to exercise power over the human body people need to acquire knowledge. This knowledge is necessary to dismiss traditional beliefs of a prejudicial nature. The article explains how rich and poor people are equal when it comes to medical ignorance. It says that it is vanity that prevents better-off people from adopting the necessary precautions: they think they are safe because they belong to the upper social classes. The article then adds that weakness and stupidity prevent the poor from acquiring this knowledge.[62]

One of the symbolic values of the skin for Victorians may lie precisely in it being an emblem of control, for containing and for holding everything together and inside. For example, the *Manchester Guardian*, in 1848, published one of the first lectures ever delivered at the Mechanics' Institute in London about human skin. The *Manchester Guardian* was founded with the aim of promoting liberal interest after the Peterloo Massacre and the movement to repeal the Corn Laws.[63] The Mechanics' Institute in London was an educational establishment that provided courses, workshops

[62] *Morning Chronicle*, 8 September 1849.
[63] History of the Guardian. A brief history of the Guardian newspaper. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/gnm-archive/2002/jun/06/1 [Accessed: 20/06/14].

and libraries, and it was a place where newspapers were regularly circulated. This lecture constitutes one of the most typical examples of attempting to disseminate popular knowledge about the skin through oral communication first (the lecture), and then written communication in the paper. The article highlights the idea of the skin as a boundary. Physician James J. Garth Wilkinson described the skin as an instrument that limits and completes the individual; as such it is a symbol of human finitude: 'without this boundary the body would be unable to contain his powers, would have no coherence, outline, or end, but would be dissipated in the universe'.[64] Then follows the typical description of the skin divided into layers and an explanation of the fundamental characteristics of this organ, such as perspiration and the ability to renew. For that matter, the term countenance, which is etymologically affiliated to 'continence', came from old French with the meaning of holding oneself. 'Wholeness' and 'limits' are the aspects through which the skin conveys its ideals of beauty synthesized by order and health. The limits of this whole would set a separation between the body and the world. Mikhail Bakhtin differentiates between an image of a grotesque body and one of a classical body, based precisely on the concepts of limits and wholeness. For the Russian philosopher, the grotesque body is an unfinished body in the act of transformation.

> Thus the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths.[65]

[64] *Manchester Guardian* 25 October 1848, p.5.
[65] Mikhail Bakhtin (Trans. by Helen Iswolsky), *Rabelais and his World* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), p.317.

This image opposes a new canon, based on the classical paradigm, in which the body is limited, finished and closed; all of the characteristics of the unfinished world, such as sweat or inner life, are removed from this flat surface where everything that occurs is interpreted with one single meaning excluding any duality.[66]

In a column called 'A Healthy Skin' the *Leeds Mercury* addressed the social importance of the skin. The *Leeds Mercury* was one of the oldest provincial papers in England. It was particularly interested in supporting general education for the working classes and in the years 1840-1850 it had a readership of around 9,000/10,000.[67] The article, signed by 'a medical man' suggested that the skin enables us to evaluate people, not only in order to distinguish who comes from England and who comes from other countries, but also, among those who come from England, if they belong to the class of 'the healthy or diseased, the washed or the unwashed, and be respected or otherwise'.[68] The first part of the article is more focused on the effects that the sight of the skin might arouse, whereas the second part presents the skin as a speaking organ: 'The organ will tell tales to those who understand it, and it is impossible to conceal what it tells'. The significance of this sentence will appear more evidently in the case studies analysed in the next chapters where wounds found during forensic examinations dictated stories to the reporters. The two main points are that in order to decipher the language of the skin there must be an understanding of what it is and how it functions; the second point is that the skin might say something which acquires greater importance when the individual to whom the skin belongs can no longer speak. Therefore a wound's analysis may explain the cause of death.

[66] Ibid., p.320.
[67] Anne Humpherys, "Leeds Mercury", in Brake and Demoor (eds.) (2009), op. cit., p.354.
[68] *Leeds Mercury*, 28 July 1883.

News about bathing

In the Victorian period, due to better sewerage and water supplies, the activation of the first publicly-funded wash houses and baths, and the repeal of the tax on soap in 1852, cleanliness become an attainable reality.[69] The provision of public baths and wash houses was part of the sanitary reformers' strategy to improve public hygiene and possibly preserve health.[70] In the nineteenth-century rapid urban growth, overcrowding, new professional occupations and poverty drew attention to the problem of hygiene and cleanliness. An insufficient drinkable water supply, the squalor of the slums and rising levels of epidemic diseases were everyday issues of the public debate fostered by social reformers and journalists.[71] In 1842 Edwin Chadwick published the famous *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Classes* and simultaneously a public bath movement started. For Chadwick personal cleanliness was one of the key themes of sanitation.[72] According to the miasma theory, to which Chadwick's ideas were anchored, smells and noxious effluvia were at the root of diseases.[73] The 1842 Report put great emphasis on the importance of drainage, ventilation and personal and environmental hygiene.

The inauguration of the first public baths and wash houses, such as the very first one in England, which opened in Liverpool in 1842, or the first in London, which

[69] Madeleine Marsh, *Compacts and Cosmetics: Beauty from Victorian Times to the Present Day* (Barnsley: Remember When, 2009), p.33.
[70] Sally Sheard, 'Profit is a Dirty Word: the Development of Public Baths and Wash-houses in Britain 1847-1915', *Social History of Medicine* 13:1 (2000), p.64.
[71] Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives. Public Health Reform in Victorian Britain* (London: Batsford Academic, 1984) in Dorothy Porter, *Health, Civilization and the State* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.113.
[72] Edwin Chadwick, 'Skin Cleanliness; Head to Foot Washing; Public Measures Proposed for its Promotion', *Journal of the Society of Arts* 25:1291, (1877), p.883.
[73] Wohl (1984), op. cit., p.72.

opened in 1847 in Whitechapel, were widely advertised by the press. The provincial and national newspapers informed their readers on the availability of washing houses and the extent to which the body could benefit from them. There were two main ways of framing news about wash houses and the benefits of washing: a Christian way and a pagan way. Both biblical themes and arguments inherited by the classical tradition informed the news coverage related to how to keep the body clean. Although this type of news appeared in most Victorian newspapers with any type of readership the targets were mainly the working class and poor. In a public address during the opening of the Albert Institution in 1859, the Lord Mayor remarked on the importance of sanitary regulations for relieving the poor. The Albert Institution prided itself on having an area for baths and wash houses for the poor and during its inauguration the Lord Mayor stated that Christianity and dirtiness do not match as in order to have a clean soul you need to have a clean body: 'A man valued himself when his skin was clean, and he held his proper place in society'.[74] The lack of scientific argumentation for promoting the custom of cleaning, replaced with moral Christian ideas, might be explained by the fact that the majority of poor people must have been illiterate and therefore a Christian argument might have been either more convincing or easier to understand because it was already part of the formation of an individual at that time while a popular knowledge of science was growing but not as widely established as the Bible. However, the newspapers could not omit to mention the founding fathers of Western medicine, the ancient Greeks and the Romans, who disseminated the use of baths across their extended empire.

[74] *ILN*, 3 September 1859, p.233.

Scottish weekly broadsheet, the *Glasgow Herald*, in 1845 published an article establishing a comparison between modern and ancient baths. One of the first striking differences is that bathing was seen as a luxurious entertainment in Roman times while in Victorian Britain it was more of a useful and necessary habit. The article mentions that the Romans used to scrape their skin with a bronze tool called a 'strigil'. The scraping operation was similar to that performed on horses with an iron hoop: 'But as the human skin is somewhat more delicate than that of a horse, the strigil was provided with a flow of oil, which made the sharp bronze edge pass over the skin as harmless [sic] as a razor over a man's face'.[75] This observation is important in the light of what would happen a year later when the death of a soldier flogged at Hounslow barracks made headlines for weeks, supplying the movement for abolishing flogging in the army with new arguments. The soldier was flogged with tools used for whipping horses and monkeys. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter but what it is important to bear in mind is that the note made in the *Herald* underlines the softness of the skin and the importance of distinguishing between the skin of a human and that of a horse.

The *Preston Guardian*, when talking about the opening of the new public baths in Saul Street, Preston, explained how the skin might benefit from bathing. The article argues that the close correlation between the skin and interior organs is not generally known and therefore people find it difficult to understand the origin of skin diseases; baths are recommended to prevent those diseases. The effect of bathing is not presented as a curative device but to help in keeping the pores of the skin free from obstructions.[76] From the *Morning Post* we learn that the Greeks and Romans regarded baths highly; they were certainly facilitated by living near to the sea with warmer temperatures than

[75] *Glasgow Herald*, 17 February 1845.
[76] *Preston Guardian*, 31 May 1851.

Britain and they understood that cleanliness and hygiene could prevent the spread of plagues.[77] Under the headline 'Bathing and the management of the skin', the *Manchester Times* published extracts from the aforementioned pamphlet entitled *Facts about Skin* written by A. J. Neale, a physician at the Manchester Skin Hospital. The extract addressed the question of the reaction of the blood vessels of the skin to different climatic conditions. Neale suggested that in order to make the body resistant to sudden changes in temperature people in good health should have a cold bath every day. The core arguments of the book's extract are structured around three themes: firstly, the reactions of the blood to the exposure of the skin to warm and cold temperatures and the importance of cutaneous vessels in regulating the temperature of the body; secondly the effect of alcohol on the skin linked to the consequent dilation of the vessels and the rapid change in bodily temperature that follows the temporary warming of the body; and finally, the importance of keeping warm by wearing more clothing. All of these points are about the capability of the skin to retain or disperse heat.[78]

A further example from the *Graphic*, which is a reprint from a 'Health Lecture' by Doctor Andrew Wilson, falls in between the news section and the advertisements. The piece promotes the notion of cleanliness and acknowledges the functions and articulated structure of the skin. It also contains final recommendations regarding taking frequent baths and the use of Pears soap as this was said to have lower levels of alkaline oils compared to common soaps. The piece also contains a metaphorical reference to the idea of the skin as a delimitating boundary:

> The beginning and end of a large part of our health exists in the proper care of the skin, and its freedom from the "sanctity of dirt", a condition

[77] *Morning Post*, 17 June 1876.
[78] *Manchester Times*, 1 November 1884.

> extremely prevalent in bygone days. […] Skin, lungs and kidneys form, in fact, a kind of physiological trio, performing essentially the same work – namely that of eliminating from our bodies the waste matters which inevitably attend every act and process of living and being.[79]

The urgency to disseminate knowledge about the importance of hygiene was justified by the fact that many sections of society did not fully acknowledge the importance of living in an environment free of dirt. In social reformer Florence Nightingale's *Notes on Nursing* there is a remark on the difference between the habits of people living in towns and those living in rural areas, which gives us an idea of how crucial it was believed to be to reform people's attitudes towards hygiene:

> Country people are much more afraid of water than town people; many a good, active, cleanly, country housewife has told me with pride that she has never had her children's feet washed in all their lives, nor let one of them ever touch himself with cold water […] there are still many a school where the greatest difficulty is found in getting the children to have their feet washed […]. An old lady began to wash herself all over with cold water, for the first time after eighty years of age, and lived ten good years afterwards.[80]

Florence Nightingale, in another paper about rural hygiene, wrote that the difference between clean skin and dirty skin is the difference between health and sickness.[81] She was making this argument with the intention of delivering the message that the difference is just in being clean or dirty rather than being moral or immoral. However, in doing so, she still gave a misleading idea regarding the connection between dirtiness and diseases, which is not always true. On the same lines, a letter on free bathing for poor children by forensic pathologist Edward Neild, addressed to the *Manchester*

[79] *Graphic*, 9 December 1882.
[80] Florence Nightingale, 'Notes on Nursing for the Labouring Classes' in Lynn McDonald (eds.), *Florence Nightingale on Public Health Care* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), p.110.
[81] Florence Nightingale, *Rural Hygiene* (London: Spottiswoode & Co, 1894), p.15.

Guardian in 1880, stated that 'filthy skins almost necessarily imply diseased bodies, with a strong tendency to insobriety in the future'.[82] The connection between skin, diseases and the poorer classes is apparent in the *Morning Chronicle* as well, where it is said that diseases of the skin are mainly caused by dirt, close air and bad food, 'to which the poorer classes are especially subject'.[83] Radcliffe Crocker, an English dermatologist and one of the leading figures in the field, clarified this misunderstanding by explaining that uncleanliness is a facilitating rather than a causing factor of disease.[84] Popular literature itself reflected therefore the coexistence of contradictory ideas around the theme of skin and cleanliness and the newspapers followed.

Skin and cholera

The popularization of the understanding of the skin in newspapers was carried out through different registers and literary genres. Poetry is one of these as we can see in this example taken from the *ILN* (Fig. 3.10). The extract published was from *Sanitary Rhymes*, a medical poem including, in addition to skin, a section about blood and another about the nervous system. The Rhymes were addressed to working class readers. They were written in 1871 by Alfred Power, Chief Commissioner of Poor Law in Ireland, to inform people regarding how to prevent cholera. The poem was first published in sanitary magazine *Hygiene* and then re-published on many other occasions by other daily and weekly newspapers and in books for medical students.[85] 'The Skin'

[82] *Manchester Guardian*, 23 August 1880.
[83] *Morning Chronicle*, 7 June 1859.
[84] Radcliffe Crocker, *Diseases of the Skin* (London: H. K. Lewis, 1893), p.19. Crocker was the first physician to define the condition of Joseph Merrick, known as the Elephant Man, as dermatolysis (pendulous skin) and pachydermatocoele (tumours growing out of the skin). See Michael Powell and Peter Ford, *The True History of the Elephant Man* (London: Allison and Busby, 1983), p.52.
[85] A reference to this poem appears in C. K. Mills, *First Lessons of Physiology and Hygiene* (Philadelphia: Eldredge & Brother, 1883).

was circulated with the intention of conveying ‘many valuable truths in a simple and attractive form’. This poem was so successful that it was widely published not only by British provincial and national papers but also abroad in American publications, such as the *New York Herald*, in which it was given a different title: ‘Remember the Skin’ and some changes were made to the punctuation. In the version appearing in the *ILN* the rhyming couplets of the verses were interspersed with lines promoting Frazer’s Sulphur Tablets. So the idea of disseminating information about the skin’s properties and functions was combined with advertising. The dominant themes are that first there is a strong connection between the skin and the internal organs and second, that the appearance of the skin reflects personal habits, in particular what a person eats, drinks, breathes and wears.

THE SKIN.

1. There 's a skin without, and a skin within,
A covering skin, and a lining skin;
But the skin within is the skin without,
Doubled inwards and carried completely throughout.

For cleansing the pores of the covering skin, and for freeing the minute canals of the lining skin from disease principles, the use of "Frazer's Sulphur Tablets" is recommended as both efficacious and safe. You may test them free of charge.

2. The palate, the nostrils, the windpipe, and throat,
Are all of them lined with this inner coat,
Which through every part is made to extend,
Lungs, liver, and bowels, from end to end.

This delicate inner lining, especially that of the stomach, liver, and intestines, is often frayed and torn by the irritant action of so-called liver, stomach, and purgative medicines. "Frazer's Sulphur Tablets" do not injure this delicate covering, but insure its vitality and purification by direct antiseptic action on the adjacent blood-vessels. You may test them free of charge.

3. The outside skin is a marvellous plan
For exuding the dregs of the flesh of man.
While the inner extracts from the food and the air
What is needed the waste of the flesh to repair.

The dregs exuded in the perspiration are often contaminated by a foul element, acrid, bitter, burning or itching, which gives rise to skin diseases, sores, ulcers, &c. The alterative, purifying action of Frazer's Sulphur Tablets is markedly beneficial in such cases; the virus or sting of the poisonous germ or disease atom is destroyed or modified. Their sudorific power likewise prevents the pores from becoming diseased by the deposition of a disease sediment. You may test them free of charge.

4. Too much brandy, whisky, or gin,
Is apt to disorder the skin within.
While, if dirty and dry, the skin without,
Refuses to let the perspiration out.

If the skin within is disordered, then ill-health or discomfort, or both at once, ensues, for at the inner skin are the tiny mouths of the nutrient channels seeking for nourishment to rebuild the wasting body. If you have a disordered inner skin, Frazer's Sulphur Tablets will gently but effectually restore healthy tone and vigour to it. You may test them free of charge.

5. Good people all, have a care of your skin,
Both of that without and that within.
To the first give plenty of water and soap,
To the last little else than water I hope.

As a preventive medicine alike safe and beneficial to the general functions, while deterrent to infectious and other diseases, Frazer's Sulphur Tablets are to be much commended. They permeate the blood with a purifying power which does not permit of the multiplication of disease germs. You may test them free of charge.

6. But always be very particular where
You get your water, your food, and your air;
For if these be tainted or rendered impure,
It will have affect on the blood, be sure.

The readiness of the blood to contract impurity is notorious, and yet this tendency can be held in check by the use of Frazer's Sulphur Tablets. No medicine ever equalled them in a curative power in blood and skin diseases. They always do good, and are powerless to harm. You may test them free of charge.

7. The food which will ever be for you the best
Is that you like most, and can soonest digest;
All unripe food and decaying flesh
Beware of, and fish that is not very fresh.

Frazer's Sulphur Tablets aid digestion, not by any action on the coats of the stomach, but by the simple and natural process of strengthening the flow of blood to the stomach; by which greater activity to the churning digestive action of the stomach is promoted. They are also an antiferment, and neutralise any putrefying gas generated by decaying food. You may test them free of charge.

8. Your water, transparent and pure as you think it,
Had better be filtered and boiled ere you drink it,
Unless you know surely that nothing unsound
Can have got to it over or under the ground.

Impure water contains vegetable fungus and living animalculæ, which reproduce themselves and multiply with almost inconceivable rapidity. Against a system fortified by occasional use of Frazer's Sulphur Tablets such germs cannot exist, as the blood, being impregnated with an antiseptic and purifying influence, these intruders wither away, and are excreted out of the system. They may be tested free of charge.

9. But of all things the most I would have you beware
Of breathing the potion of once-breathed air;
In bed, whether out or at home you may be,
Always open the window and let it go free.

Vitiated air is inhaled by every indrawn breath, and pure air, being meant by Nature to purify the blood, as the latter leaps at every breath from ventricle to ventricle, it stands to reason the blood becomes impure if the air is tainted. If you have contracted blood disease by this means, or work in a vitiated atmosphere, Frazer's Sulphur Tablets are curative in the first instance, and greatly preventive in the second. They may be tested free of charge.

10. With clothing and exercise keep yourself warm,
And change your clothes quickly if caught in a storm;
For a cold caught by chilling the outside skin
Flies at once to the delicate lining within.

If you have taken cold, open the pores from internally, and relieve their congestion by using Frazer's Sulphur Tablets. They act both by direct stimulative action on the blood itself, relieving the congestion, and also by a sudorific or opening action from internally on the pores. They are also greatly to be commended in the treatment of rheumatism, fever, gout, &c. They always do good, and may be tested free of charge.

11. All you who thus kindly take care of your skin,
And attend to its wants without and within,
Need not of cholera feel any fears,
And your skin may last you a hundred years.

Nos. 1 to 11 above are taken from *Hygiene*, a monthly sanitary magazine, and are attributed to Sir Alfred Power, K.C.B. They are given here as conveying many valuable truths in a simple and attractive form.

BREAKING THE RECORD.

A few days since we published a statement as to the growth of the sale of Frazer's Sulphur Tablets, showing that 48,400 packets were sold in February 1891. For the week ending March 7, 1891, the sales were 13,680 packets; for week ending March 14, 14,520 packets, or at the rate of 57,000 packets per month. The reason of the rapid growth is simple: the samples prove to people the great worth and pleasant taste of Frazer's Sulphur Tablets. The applications for samples come pouring in by every post. Yesterday we received nearly 800 letters and post-cards. To-day we received upwards of 1000. And so many people write to say they want to test them for skin eruptions or breakings out on their children. And we are glad to say the Tablets are absolutely safe and efficacious for children; and the little ones like the Tablets because the taste is pleasant. Frazer's Sulphur Tablets deserve a place in every home, and are gradually becoming universally known and appreciated. Frazer's Sulphur Tablets are recommended in the treatment of all Blood and Skin Diseases, Eruptive Fevers, and infectious complaints, also in Rheumatism, Constipation, and as insuring a clear, healthy complexion. Write us a letter or post-card, naming "The Penny Illustrated Paper," and we will send you

SAMPLES GRATIS AND POST FREE.

Frazer's Sulphur Tablets are put up in packets, price 1s. 1½d. (post free, 1s. 3d.), and are for sale by Chemists and others.

Sole Proprietors—**FRAZER & Co., 11, Ludgate Square, London, E.C.**

Figure 3.10 *ILN*, 9 May 1891.

The beginning of the poem ‘there’s a skin without, and a skin within’ anticipates the leitmotiv of the poem, which is that there are two skins: the outside one and the inner one: ‘The outside skin is a marvellous plan / for exuding the drugs of the flash of man. /

While the inner extracts from the food and the air/ what is needed the waste of the flesh to repair'. This type of motif supports the scope of the advertisement for the tablets, because one of the ideas is that the skin is affected by what you put into your mouth and in contrast to soap, the tablets were a medicament to be taken by mouth. The poem concludes by saying:

> All you who thus kindly take care of your skin.
> And attend to its wants without and within,
> Need never of cholera feel any fears,
> And your skin may last you a hundred years!

This poem also appeared in the *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* but without the advertisements inserted. Note that in some versions, in the penultimate verse, the word 'smallpox' often replaces the word 'cholera'. The problem with this poem is that it was far from providing a 'valuable truth': it was not by taking care of the skin that you could actually prevent either cholera or smallpox. The anxiety about cholera was largely caused by the fact that between 1832 and 1866 Britain was hit by four cholera epidemics. The arrival of epidemic diseases in urban centres provided a vocabulary structured around the notion of bodily health as the grounds of the modern state.[86]

Cholera is a bacterial infection that manifests through watery diarrhoea and consequent dramatic dehydration. It occurred in pandemics and epidemics for many centuries and arrived in Britain in 1831. During the fourth epidemic, which hit London in 1854, English physician John Snow discovered that cholera was spread by contaminated water rather than by pollution as had commonly been believed previously. Erin O' Connor explained that cholera was seen as a 'somatised social critique':

[86] Pamela Gilbert, *Cholera and Nation. Doctoring the Social Body in Victorian England* (Albany: State of New York Press, 2008), p.5.

‘Victorian writers capitalized on the historical convergence of economic growth and epidemic spread, using Asiatic cholera as a metonymy for the disruptive effects of social change’.[87] When germ theory was developed suspicion over the body as a site of filth itself was over-emphasized:

> Instead of eating being a taking of materials inside through an opening of the body, through a clearly demarcated boundary between outside and inside, it becomes a placing in contiguity of certain, potentially dangerous (impure) materials with the porous surface of the body. The body is thus, in one sense, sealed (it has no opening, only a continuous skin). Even materials taken into the body are outside the skin (the stomach becomes a space exterior to the body proper), yet radically permeable (the whole surface is now a potential space of ingress and egress).[88]

Between 1848 and 1849 Snow published ‘On the Mode of Communication of Cholera’, which clarified that cholera was water-borne; the connection between the skin and cholera was not mentioned at all. In 1883 Robert Koch isolated the bacillus, *cholerae vibrio*. What is interesting is the fact that despite Snow’s discovery and the fact that by the end of the nineteenth century the causes of cholera were known, skin cleanliness was still presented as a way of preventing it. By 1891, the year when ‘Skin’ appeared in the *ILN*, it was known that cholera was transmitted by faecal contamination of food and water. It is interesting that the poem places such a great emphasis on skin porosity, almost as if the transmission of the cholera virus happened through the skin rather than through the oral ingestion of food or water contaminated by faecal matter. Pamela Gilbert has explained that sanitary texts produced during the second half of the nineteenth century concentrated their content on the surface of the body as it was

[87] Erin O’Connor, *Raw Material: Producing Pathology in Victorian Culture* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000), p.26.
[88] Gilbert (2008), op. cit., p.104.

intended as a delicate point of encounter between the 'self and the not self': it divides and connects the outside and inside at the same time.[89] Furthermore, there might be three concatenated reasons for why the care of the skin was presented as a means of fighting cholera. The first is that the point of cholera is the passage from one orifice to another as it is transmitted mainly by eating food or drinking water contaminated by the feces: the presence of these orifices reminds us of the grotesque body in which the inside and the outside are put in communication and where the body cannot limit or control anything. Some of the symptoms of cholera are in fact diarrhoea and vomiting. The skin might then be a signifier, with its small orifices, the pores, of this passage between the inside and the outside that is so crucial to cholera. The print media might have found this type of allusion more suitable for the readers of their newspapers than mentioning excrement that goes into the mouth. Also, the press were more inclined to promote a classical idea of the body rather than a grotesque one, in which, as Bakhtin noted, there is no control over what goes in and outside the body. The second reason is that the symptoms of cholera emerge on the body's surface. Cholera was nicknamed the 'blue death' because of the respiratory failure that it creates and the dehydration that produces a bluish tint in the skin of its victims.[90] The purple skin became then in pathological watercolours and coloured engravings the typical indicator of cholera, almost as if it were a skin disease. The third reason is that 'the skin' might work as a metonym for 'the body' or metaphorically for 'health'. So ultimately the poem is not an invitation to take care of the skin, but rather an invitation to protect the body and control its intakes and discharges. As Gilbert said, cholera 'dramatized all of the anxieties about

[89] Ibid., p103.
[90] Susan Bandoni Muench, 'The Mystery of the Blue Death: a Case Study in Epidemiology and the History of Science', *Journal of College Science Teaching* 39:1 (2009), p.63.

bodily control'.[91] Similarly, it could be said that the skin became the site through which these anxieties were channelled.

In 1849, the *Daily News*, a morning paper that called for reform in social political and economic legislation,[92] printed one of its briefs calling attention to skin care as a preventive measure against cholera. It was a reprint from *Healthy Skin* by Erasmus Wilson, in which the dermatologist explained that the Board of Health instructions regarding the prevention of cholera included the necessity of keeping the skin clean and that only knowledge of the skin could ensure that people knew how to take care of it.[93] In *Healthy Skin*'s preface it was stated that the book was mainly about the structure and phenomena of the skin and how to preserve its beauty and it was stated that proper and thoughtful attention to the skin could preserve people from the attack of Asiatic Cholera. Erasmus Wilson was a leading dermatologist and philanthropist who published professional and popular books about the skin with the precise intention of disseminating information to the lay public. His objective was to propose skin cleanliness as a key point in the sanitation reform.[94] Wilson published a series of lectures on dermatology in 1840 and his *Practical and Theoretical Treatise on Diseases of the Skin* in 1842. In 1867 Wilson established the *Journal of Cutaneous Medicine and Diseases of the Skin*; this was the first British dermatological journal. *Healthy Skin*, which was dedicated to social reformer Edwin Chadwick, was written in the light of recent discoveries about the skin's cellular anatomy and its arguments were used to ameliorate conditions for the poor in the crowded urban centres.[95] In 1877, in an article

[91] Gilbert (2008), op. cit., p.105.
[92] John Kofron, "Daily News", in *DNJ* (2009), op. cit., p.158.
[93] *Daily News*, 31 July 1849.
[94] te Hennepe (2007), op. cit., p.96.
[95] te Hennepe (2014), op. cit., p.402.

on skin cleanliness published in the *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Chadwick stated: 'Skin cleanliness is certainly a great preservative against passing epidemics and against visitations of the most infectious and contagious diseases'.[96] Care of the skin with regard to the 'outward and visible signs of moral depravity, of idleness, mendacity, and the lowest vice' was then misleadingly promoted as giving immunity against epidemics.[97]

An article published in *The Times* in the years before Snow's discovery seems to hint at the fact that the skin might not save you from cholera if we accept that the 'human barriers' include the skin. A correspondent for *The Times*, from Aden, said:

> The rich and poor, young and old, all have alike become victims. I believe no quarantine laws, however wisely constructed, or however rigorously carried into effect, can stop or delay its onward march. All human barriers are totally useless. It traverses sea and land in its destructive course.[98]

However, the article, later on, does not contradict Chadwick but actually reiterates the fact that ventilation and cleanliness may prevent the spread of disease. 'Human barriers' might well mean artificial barriers conceived by the human mind. In September 1849, following a notification issued by the Board of Guardians of the Paddington parish, *The Times* published a piece on cholera, which had as its third point on a list a section on cleanliness, in which it was said that the skin should be frequently washed and the greatest attention paid to personal cleanliness.[99]

> The instructions put forth by the Board of Health for securing our defence against cholera, and the evidence collected with regard to this

[96] Chadwick (1877), op. cit., p.883.
[97] Ibid.
[98] *The Times*, 4 July 1846, p.3.
[99] *The Times*, 13 September 1849, p.4.

> frightful disorder, abound in recommendations having reference to the maintenance of the skin is a state of cleanliness.[100]

Conclusion

This first findings section of the thesis aimed to offer a panoramic view of the different usages of the skin in Victorian newspapers and their relationship with the popular and medical literature of the time. This section of the thesis followed more strictly the methodology based on keyword research in historical online publications. The analysis focused on those items where the word skin occurred mostly from a quantitative point of view and on those items where the skin was identified by the software as a 'keyword'. The mapping obtained made it possible to identify three key ways of framing skin in newspapers.

The first of these was commercially oriented. Information about the skin was marshalled through the use of advertisements in a growing industry of commodities, in particular during the last decades of the century. Soap and cosmetics adverts promoted a beauty ideal of skin as a social mask that should be taken care of. The advertisements used an image of pale, flawless, spot-free skin to promote an ideal of beauty that was easily attainable through the external application of products such as soap and powders. The skin was described as an indicator of morality: a lack of skin care came to be associated with poverty and ignorance and was liable to social condemnation. Science popularizers and physicians lent their supposedly authoritative names to newspapers to

[100] Erasmus Wilson, *Healthy Skin: A Popular Treatise on the Skin and Hair, their Preservation and Management* (London: Churchill and Burlington, 1855), p.vii.

put forward issues such as the importance of cleanliness and living in a dirt-free environment for both the body and the soul.

The second way in which information about the skin appeared in newspapers was epistemological. In the weekly and daily press, in both advertisements and public health columns, readers could sometimes find valuable, and sometimes less reliable, facts about the skin. While in the advertisements the skin tended to be mainly conceived as an external cover, in the news sections an idea of the skin as a multi-layered organ emerged. These two visions of the skin cannot be separated as the Victorian newspapers contained both perspectives. They demonstrate that an idea of the skin as a stratified organ never completely replaced the more old-fashioned idea of the skin as an external layer separated from the rest of the body.

The final point that emerged was that skin care was used as an argument to foster the sanitation movement. If on the one hand this was beneficial because it spread hygiene awareness, on the other hand it created a misunderstanding surrounding the causes of epidemic diseases. We have seen how in newspapers the skin could be thought of as a blank canvas onto which were projected inferences about some of the most pressing Victorian issues, such as appearance, cleanliness and disease, between the years 1840 and 1900.

Chapter 4. Effects of flogging on the skin. *The Times* coverage of the Hounslow Inquest 1846

At the turn of the second half of the nineteenth century, in 1846, an inquest connected to the British army posed a challenge to the common understanding of the skin as an impenetrable barrier of the human body. A soldier called John Frederick White died from wounds caused by the infliction of 150 lashes during a military punishment. The Private had been sentenced to flogging as a result of having assaulted a sergeant with a poker while under the effects of alcohol. The medical officers within the army denied any connection between the death of the soldier and the effects of the flogging. They suggested that the cause of death was a disease of the lungs and heart. They were ready to bury the body when the news reached the coroner for Middlesex. The coroner was Thomas Wakley, the medical journalist who had founded the *Lancet* in 1823. Wakley, who was an ardent reformer and anti-flogging campaigner, opted to hold an inquest. This inquiry was covered extensively by the British press, making headlines for weeks in the summer of 1846. White was not the first person to die from the effects of flogging, but this was the first occasion where the medico-juridical discussion surrounding the wounds caused by the punishment of flogging was used as an argument by a newspaper against corporal punishment. In reporting the event *The Times* newspaper, with its in-depth coverage, provided a public forum in which the fields of medicine, law and politics converged to question physical punishment.

The aim of this chapter is to show how *The Times* covered the inquest into the death of Private White. In doing so it will address the following questions: how did John White's death challenge the common perception of the skin as an envelope

protecting the body, which was separated from the inner organs? How did the shift in the understanding of the body's surface reinforce the argument against flogging? How was the *post-mortem* medical evidence framed in the news? What impact did the eventual intervention of dermatologist Erasmus Wilson have on the inquest's outcome? This section of the thesis argues that *The Times* recognized in the popularization of the knowledge of the skin a key topic for supporting a contemporary public campaign to abolish flogging in the military.

The Times, the skin and the anti-flogging campaign

Beating someone's back with sticks, rods, straps, whips or other tools was until the twentieth century a judicial measure adopted to maintain order in schools, prisons, military homes and private homes.[1] In 1530 the Whipping Act in England permitted the flogging of people who had committed minor offences, such as thieves, blasphemers and poachers. In the military the punishment of flogging had been legally authorised by the 1689 Mutiny Act. In the eighteenth century flogging with the cat o'-nine-tails had become the ordinary mode of punishment in the army.[2] The cat o' nine tails was a tool made up of nine knotted thongs of cotton: it could be found in veterinary shops, as the same instrument was employed for whipping animals. An individual could be inflicted with anything from fifty up to thousands of lashes that were given in different instalments during the period of a year. A time interval was allowed between the whipping sessions to give the skin the opportunity

[1] "flogging." Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2014.Web. 14 Jul 2014.http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/210444/flogging.
[2] John Rowland Dinwiddy, 'The Early Nineteenth-Century Campaign against Flogging in the Army', *The English Historical Review* 97:383 (1982), p.309.

to heal.[3] Michel Foucault observed that in fact 'death torture is the art of maintaining life in pain, by subdividing into a thousand of deaths'.[4] The punishment of flogging fits this principle well because usually people who died of its effects did not die immediately but weeks later, usually as a consequence of septic shock caused by bacteria in the bloodstream. Considering the skin's healing only as a symptom of full recovery was a misconception generated from an understanding of the skin as a superficial layer that was independent of the underlying tissues. Once the skin had healed a soldier could be flogged again regardless of what was happening under the skin, which was usually great inflammation of the internal organs. In fact, as we will see shortly, one of the first arguments proposed by the military officers in denying the linkage between White's death and the flogging was that the skin had healed promptly between the time of the punishment and the time of death. John Hale, from the Army Medical Department, stated that his back had healed 'kindly'.[5] Flogging was not intended as a form of capital punishment but indeed not infrequently it turned out to have fatal effects on the bodies of those who endured the whipping. At the time when the accident at Hounslow was taking place bacteriology had not yet been explored but it was known that people who were flogged sometimes died. As stated in the literature review, in the nineteenth-century, the image of the skin as a superficial coverage was stronger than it is today. Its connection with the rest of the body was not well understood and therefore the connection between the effects of whipping the skin and the inflammation of the internal organs might not have been comprehended by either doctors or non-medical people. Before contextualizing the function of *The Times* during the forties and analysing the news coverage of the

[3] George R. Scott, *The History of Corporal Punishment* (London: Torchstream, 1950), p.86.
[4] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.33.
[5] *The Times*, 28 July 1846, p.7.

inquest, it is necessary to discuss two preliminary findings obtained through the keyword based-search. It appears that *The Times*, among all of the newspapers, occupied a special position in the news portrayal of the inquest. This chapter analyses *The Times* in particular because from the results obtained through the digital search it emerged that this newspaper connected the inquest into the flogging at Hounslow with the observations about the skin of the soldier made by the surgeons who had performed the *post-mortem* examinations. The *Examiner*, which, historically, has been considered as one of the newspapers that attacked the system of flogging in the army, in particular at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, hardly mentioned the skin throughout the inquest.[6] As chart 4.1 shows, it was in *The Times* that the terms 'skin' and 'flogging', were principally seen together. The *Morning Post*, one of the main rivals of *The Times*, shows the highest numerical employment of the word skin, but *The Times* is the place where the terms 'flogging' and 'skin' occurred together in articles concerning the inquest. The two terms appear in the same article14 times; whereas the average for the other papers was seven times. From the beginning of the inquest, *The Times* did not write about it without mentioning the evidence provided by the analysis of the skin on the back of the soldier.

[6] For the *Examiner*'s news coverage of the anti-flogging campaign see Richard L. Blanco, 'Attempts to Abolish Branding and Flogging in the Army of Victorian England before 1881', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 46:187 (1968), and Dinwiddy (1982), op. cit.

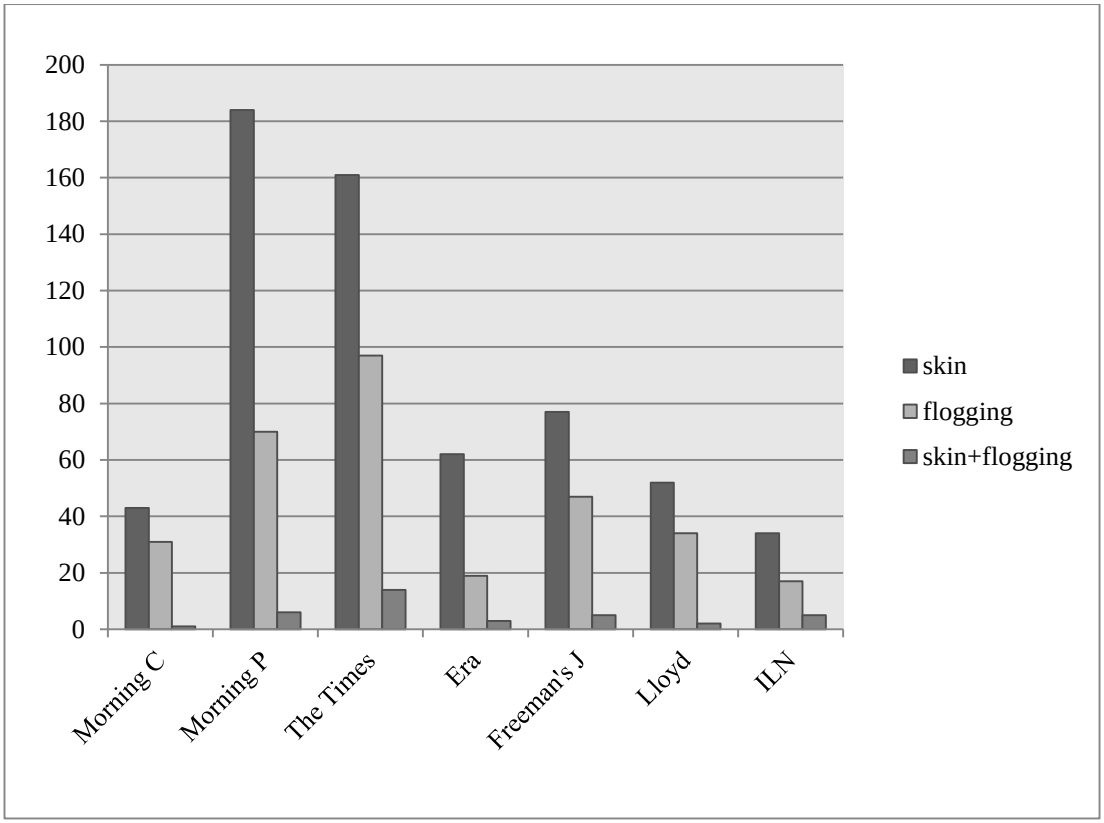


Chart 4.1 Full-text search for 'skin', 'flogging', and 'skin + flogging' in seven newspapers (July-August 1846)

Chart 4.2 shows *The Times'* increasing interest in the topic of 'skin' throughout the nineteenth century. There is an increase in the number of appearances of the terms with two peaks in 1846 and 1865. The significantly increased number of occurrences of the word skin in 1846 is clearly connected to the Hounslow inquest. As for the other date, there is a curious coincidence, as 1865 was the year of two other big inquests that dealt with the skin: deaths due to bed-sores in workhouses, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Briefly, two inquests were launched by the Poor Law Commission following the deaths of two men who allegedly suffered from bed-sores while residing in a workhouse. However, in contrast to the flogging inquest, the digital research did not demonstrate an incontrovertible connection between increased use of the term 'skin' and the inquests into the bed-sores. The connection

might be purely casual.

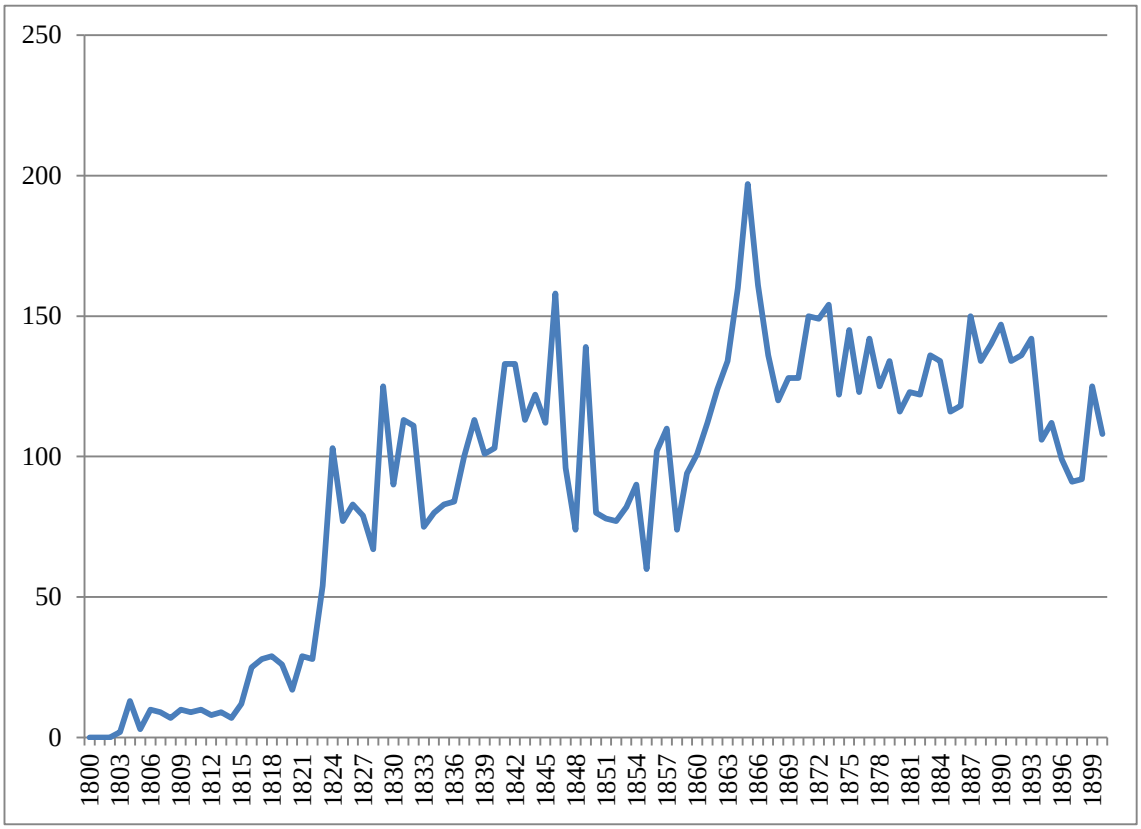


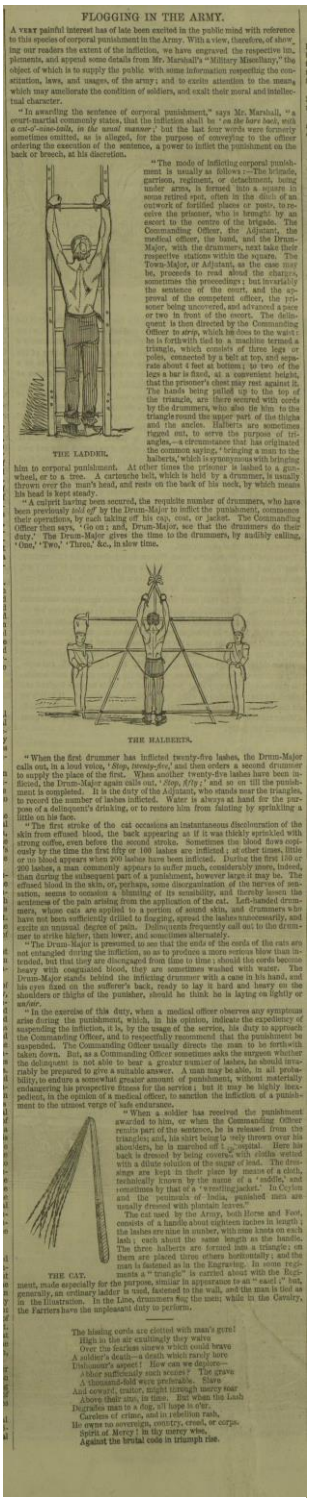
Chart 4.2. A search for the term 'skin' between 1800 and 1900 using The Times Digital Archive.

The anti-flogging movement had started earlier in the century in the government and it was aided by several radical newspapers. However, none of these used the potentiality of discussing the actual wounds from a medical point of view in mobilizing public opinion. *The Times* seems to have individualized in the skin a micro-theme for its educated middle-class readership, which was a vehicle for larger topics such as the care of soldiers and the inadequacy of corporal punishment.

Under the editorship of Thomas Barnes, *The Times* supported a series of popular campaigns: the Peterloo victims, the plight of Queen Caroline, the need for a reform and

the unpopularity of the Poor Law; these attracted a growing readership of liberal-med person.[7]

The role of *The Times* in political and social reform was encapsulated in a term coined in 1832; the newspaper was nicknamed 'the Thunderer'. The paper acquired this nickname due to its declared support for the Reform Bill, which became an Act in 1832. During the forties *The Times* also supported social crusades such as the anti-Poor Law and the campaign for the repeal of the Corn Laws, which eventually happened in 1846. Furthermore, the political force of the newspaper emerged strikingly in 1834 when the newspaper's then editor Thomas Barnes contributed to the formation of the new government by supporting Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington; and again in 1855, when it forced Lord Aberdeen to resign after his improper decisions



FLOGGING IN THE ARMY.

A VERY painful interest has of late been excited in the public mind with reference to this species of corporal punishment in the Army. With a view, therefore, of showing our readers the extent of the infliction, we have engraved the respective implements, and append some details from Mr. Marshall's "Military Miscellany," the object of which is to supply the public with some information respecting the constitution, laws, and usages, of the army; and to excite attention to the means which may ameliorate the condition of soldiers, and exalt their moral and intellectual character.

"In awarding the sentence of corporal punishment," says Mr. Marshall, "a court-martial commonly states, that the infliction shall be 'on the bare back, with a cat-o'-nine-tails, in the usual manner;' but the last four words were formerly sometimes omitted, as is alleged, for the purpose of conveying to the officer ordering the execution of the sentence, a power to inflict the punishment on the back or breech, at his discretion.

"The mode of inflicting corporal punishment is usually as follows:—The brigade, garrison, regiment, or detachment, being under arms, is formed into a square in some retired spot, often in the ditch of an outwork of fortified places or posts, to receive the prisoner, who is brought by an escort to the centre of the brigade. The Commanding Officer, the Adjutant, the medical officer, the band, and the Drum-Major, with the drummers, next take their respective stations within the square. The Town-Major, or Adjutant, as the case may be, proceeds to read aloud the charges, sometimes the proceedings; but invariably the sentence of the court, and the approval of the competent officer, the prisoner being uncovered, and advanced a pace or two in front of the escort. The delinquent is then directed by the Commanding Officer to strip, which he does to the waist; he is forthwith tied to a machine termed a triangle, which consists of three legs or poles, connected by a belt at top, and separate about 4 feet at bottom; to two of the legs a bar is fixed, at a convenient height, that the prisoner's chest may rest against it. The hands being pulled up to the top of the triangle, are there secured with cords by the drummers, who also tie him to the triangle round the upper part of the thighs and the ancles. Halberts are sometimes rigged out, to serve the purpose of triangles,—a circumstance that has originated the common saying, 'bringing a man to the halberts,' which is synonymous with bringing him to corporal punishment. At other times the prisoner is lashed to a gun-wheel, or to a tree. A cartouche belt, which is held by a drummer, is usually thrown over the man's head, and rests on the back of his neck, by which means his head is kept steady.

THE LADDER.

"A culprit having been secured, the requisite number of drummers, who have been previously told off by the Drum-Major to inflict the punishment, commence their operations, by each taking off his cap, coat, or jacket. The Commanding Officer then says, 'Go on; and, Drum-Major, see that the drummers do their duty.' The Drum-Major gives the time to the drummers, by audibly calling, 'One,' 'Two,' 'Three,' &c., in slow time.

THE HALBERTS.

"When the first drummer has inflicted twenty-five lashes, the Drum-Major calls out, in a loud voice, 'Stop, twenty-five,' and then orders a second drummer to supply the place of the first. When another twenty-five lashes have been inflicted, the Drum-Major again calls out, 'Stop, fifty;' and so on till the punishment is completed. It is the duty of the Adjutant, who stands near the triangle, to record the number of lashes inflicted. Water is always at hand for the purpose of a delinquent's drinking, or to restore him from fainting by sprinkling a little on his face.

"The first stroke of the cat occasions an instantaneous discolouration of the skin from effused blood, the back appearing as if it was thickly sprinkled with strong coffee, even before the second stroke. Sometimes the blood flows copiously by the time the first fifty or 100 lashes are inflicted; at other times, little or no blood appears when 200 lashes have been inflicted. During the first 150 or 200 lashes, a man commonly appears to suffer much, considerably more, indeed, than during the subsequent part of a punishment, however large it may be. The effused blood in the skin, or, perhaps, some disorganisation of the nerves of sensation, seems to occasion a blunting of its sensibility, and thereby lessen the acuteness of the pain arising from the application of the cat. Left-handed drummers, whose cats are applied to a portion of sound skin, and drummers who have not been sufficiently drilled to flogging, spread the lashes unnecessarily, and excite an unusual degree of pain. Delinquents frequently call out to the drummer to strike higher, then lower, and sometimes alternately.

"The Drum-Major is presented so as that the ends of the cords of the cats are not entangled during the infliction, so as to produce a more serious blow than intended, but that they are disengaged from time to time; should the cords become heavy with coagulated blood, they are sometimes washed with water. The Drum-Major stands behind the inflicting drummer with a cane in his hand, and his eyes fixed on the sufferer's back, ready to lay it hard and heavy on the shoulders or thighs of the punisher, should he think he is laying on lightly or unfair.

"In the exercise of this duty, when a medical officer observes any symptoms arise during the punishment, which, in his opinion, indicate the expediency of suspending the infliction, it is, by the usage of the service, his duty to approach the Commanding Officer, and to respectfully recommend that the punishment be suspended. The Commanding Officer usually directs the man to be forthwith taken down. But, as a Commanding Officer sometimes asks the surgeon whether the delinquent is not able to bear a greater number of lashes, he should invariably be prepared to give a suitable answer. A man may be able, in all probability, to endure a somewhat greater amount of punishment, without materially endangering his prospective fitness for the service; but it may be highly inexpedient, in the opinion of a medical officer, to sanction the infliction of a punishment to the utmost verge of his endurance.

"When a soldier has received the punishment awarded to him, or when the Commanding Officer remits part of the sentence, he is released from the triangles; and, his shirt being only thrown over his shoulders, he is marched off to hospital. Here his back is dressed by being covered with cloths wetted with a dilute solution of the sugar of lead. The dressings are kept in their place by means of a cloth, technically known by the name of a 'saddle,' and sometimes by that of a 'wrestling-jacket.' In Ceylon and the peninsula of India, punished men are usually dressed with plantain leaves."

THE CAT.

The cat used by the Army, both Horse and Foot, consists of a handle about eighteen inches in length; the lashes are nine in number, with nine knots on each lash; each about the same length as the handle. The three halberts are formed into a triangle; on them are placed three others horizontally; and the man is fastened as in the Engraving. In some regiments a "triangle" is carried about with the Regiment, made especially for the purpose, similar in appearance to an "easel;" but, generally, an ordinary ladder is used, fastened to the wall, and the man is tied as in the illustration. In the Line, drummers flog the men; while in the Cavalry, the Farriers have the unpleasant duty to perform.

The blazing cords are clotted with man's gore!
High in the air exultingly they wave
Over the fearless sinews which could brave
A soldier's death—a death which rarely bore
Dishonour's aspect! How can we deplore—
Abhor sufficiently such scenes? The grave
A thousand-fold were preferable. Slave—
And coward! traitor, might through mercy soar
Above their sins, in time. But when the Lash
Degrades man to a dog, all hope is o'er.
Careless of crime, and in rebellion rash,
He owns no sovereign, country, creed, or corps.
Spirit of Mercy! in thy mercy wise,
Against the brutal code in triumph rise.

Figure 4.1 *ILN*, 1 August

[7] Lucy Brown, 'The British Press, 1800-1860' in Dennis Griffiths (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of the British Press*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1992), p.26.

during the Crimean War.[8] *The Times* was among those established newspapers that rose to prominence in the 1840s and 1850s facilitated by the abolition of the 'taxes on knowledge'.[9] In 1841 *The Times* sold twice the number of copies as the *Morning Post*, *Morning Herald* and *Morning Chronicle* put together, and by 1850 four times as many.[10] By then the capability of the paper to drag the reader's attention to social problems, predict events and address public opinion was already a recognized feature of *The Times*.[11] This newspaper's reputation for influence and impact, circulation and quality ensured its predominance on bourgeois public opinion.[12]

The public resentment towards flogging had started long before the inquest that this chapter will explore. At the beginning of the century the campaign in Parliament had been backed by some radical newspapers such as William Cobbett's *Political Register*. In 1809, journalist William Cobbett published an indignant article on the flogging of some local paramilitary soldiers at Ely who protested against a deduction from their pay.[13] As a result, Cobbett was sentenced to two years imprisonment in Newgate and fined £1000.[14] Edward Thompson said that: 'Next to the press gang, flogging was perhaps the most heated of the institutions of Old England. Cobbett laid the basis for his great popularity among the common people when he was imprisoned in 1810 for denouncing its abuse'.[15] In 1811 English Reformist politician Francis Burdett put forward a request in Parliament for the abolition of flogging in the army. *The Times* accompanied the publication of the

[8] Andrew Hobbs, 'The Deleterious Dominance of The Times in Nineteenth-Century Scholarship', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 18:9 (2013), p.473.
[9] George Boyce, 'The Fourth Estate: the Reappraisal of a Concept', in George Boyce et al. (eds.), *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Constable, 1978), p.22.
[10] Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p. 47
[11] The Times, *History of The Times, Vol. 2: The Tradition Established, 1842-1884* (London: The Times Publishing Company, 1939), p.147.
[12] Martin Conboy, *Journalism. A Critical History*, (London: Sage, 2004), p.118.
[13] *Political Register*, 1 July 1809.
[14] George D. H. Cole, *Life of William Cobbett* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.107.
[15] Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), p.662.

parliamentary proceedings with cases of fatal floggings that had taken place in the army up until that time; for this reason the two authors of the pieces were sanctioned.[16] *The Times* was the paper that made the greatest effort in the flogging case at Hounslow, in aligning popular inquiry with the progression of reform and by drawing attention to the political significance of the case.[17] The *Examiner* also embraced the anti-flogging campaign and several pamphlets were circulated widely but none of them addressed in detail the physical effects of flogging on the human body. Usually there were illustrations setting the scene and showing the instruments of torture: the cat o' nine tails and the triangle or ladder that soldiers were tied to. Figure 4.1 displays an extract from the *Illustrated London News* as it was published during the inquest. It shows the difference between the triangle and the ladder. The triangle was a tripod, originally formed of three wooden beams, to which the person to be punished was tied. At the bottom of the article is an example of a cat o' nine tails.

The inquest at Hounslow was held on four dates: 15, 20 and 27 July and 3 August 1846. The narrative style of the *The Times* was to print the latest news about the inquest, interspersed with commentary sections including recapitulation, clarifications, summaries, editorials and letters from readers. Several characters emerged during the development of the events surrounding the inquiry into the death of John White. The names to keep in mind are the already mentioned Thomas Wakley, the medical coroner for Middlesex; Colonel John James Whyte, the commanding officer at the Cavalry Barracks in Hounslow; and the army surgeon Dr.

[16] *The Times*, 19 June 1811, p.2.
[17] Ian Burney, *Bodies of Evidence, Medicine and the Politics of English Inquest, 1830-1926* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), p.46.

James Low Warren, in the presence of whom the punishment was inflicted. The body of the soldier was buried twice and examined three times; the surgeons who performed the *post-mortem* examinations were staff surgeon John Hall, assistant staff surgeon Francis Reid and Law Warren (first exam); a surgeon external to the army, Horatio Grosvenor Day (second exam); and finally, another surgeon who had no connection with the military who was an expert in dermatology, Erasmus Wilson (third exam). Harry Hopkins observed that not often was such a range of medical expertise employed in an inquest on a private soldier.[18] The fact that the coroner was a medical expert himself was of great influence upon the way in which the inquest was conducted. Wakley was asked to obtain legal evidence through forensic analysis. The evidence he was looking for was the connection between the flogging and the death of the soldier. Wakley directed the press towards highlighting that connection in its reports.

Prelude

On 15 June 1846, a private of the 7th Royal Hussars at Hounslow Barracks, Frederick John White, was flogged 150 times for insolent behaviour towards a sergeant. A few weeks later, while he was still recovering from the wounds generated from the punishment he received, *The Times*, without apparently knowing what had happened at Hounslow, published an article entitled 'The moral condition of the soldier'. The piece, which appeared on 2 July 1846, was a review of two newly written books on the harsh conditions endured by British soldiers.[19] The authors of the two volumes, Henry Marshall and William Fergusson, came from the medical profession and both

[18] Harry Hopkins, *The Strange Death of Private White: a Victorian Scandal that Made History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p.138.
[19] *The Times*, 2 July 1846, p. 3.

denounced medical errors perpetuated by 'the tenacity of the human mind in adherence to error' in respect to military matters.[20] Marshall was an inspector of army hospitals, and Fergusson was an army medical officer. *The Times* presented the two publications as examples of attempts to raise public awareness about the degraded condition of the British soldier's life, particularly with regard to corporal punishment. The article touched on anti-flogging arguments that focussed on the inefficacy of any form of torture (for formative purposes) and on the fact that in other countries it was already banned.[21] The article suggested that, instead of lashes, military prisoners should be given instruction and books:

> We can discover no valid reason for depriving of all moral culture the very body whom, strangely enough, we make the defenders of the national honour, whilst they carry in their persons the signs of a national disgrace.[22]

The article also cited Oliver Cromwell as supportive of the anti-flogging cause, since the military and political leader was said to have already understood, back in the seventeenth century, the necessity of seeing something more than flesh and blood in soldiers who join the army 'for liberty and honour.' The point made by Cromwell and extrapolated by *The Times* was the importance of taking care of the spirit of the troops as well as their bodies. Less than two weeks after the publication of the piece on the moral condition of the soldier, *The Times* broke the news that a Private of the 7th Royal Hussars had died as the result of a flogging he had received at the Cavalry Barracks in Hounslow. In retrospect, the article published just a few days before on

[20] William Fergusson, *Notes and Recollections of a Professional Life* (London: Longman, 1846), p.120.
[21] A similar argument had been already presented in *The Times*, on 11 March 1826, when Robert Wilson proposed the abolition of flogging in the army on the grounds that in other nations it was already no longer in use.
[22] *The Times*, 2 July 1846: p.3. The source for the extract from the Oliver Cromwell speech that *The Times* quotes may be John J. Heneage, *Memoires of the Court of England during the Reign of the Stuarts, Including the Protectorate* (London: Bentley, 1840).

the topic of punishment in the army appears to have been an omen of what was going to happen later. Or, *The Times* already knew what had happened at Hounslow. From this moment on, the soldiers' blood and flesh that Cromwell had alluded to centuries before, were in fact going to be the newspapers' dominant discourse, regarding what Hopkins called a 'Victorian scandal that made history'.[23]

Thomas Wakley leads the inquest

This section will explore in detail *The Times* coverage of the Hounslow inquest. The description is not in chronological order. Instead it follows a thematic organization: it looks at each of the three main points that emerged during the inquest. These are: the story of the missing fragment of skin; the problem of establishing what 'excessive' flogging means; and, the final outcome of the inquest, which will explain the relationship between superficial wounds and the inner organs. This organization of the chapter explains why sometimes a few temporal jumps are needed in order to fully develop each of the themes.

On 15 June 1846, John Frederick White, a 27[24] year-old private based at Hounslow Barracks, was given 150 lashes for assaulting his sergeant with a metal bar while drunk. The private was flogged in front of 300 soldiers, their commanding officer Colonel Whyte and the surgeon Dr. James Low Warren. After being flogged the soldier, whistling, walked himself to the hospital to have his wounds dressed. A couple of weeks later the skin on his back had healed. Two weeks after that, on 11

[23] Hopkins (1977), op. cit.
[24] At the time of his death the soldier was 26 years and 11 months old. This explains why in *The Times* sometimes he is said to be 26, and on other occasions, is said to be 27 years old.

July, he was found dead in his dormitory. After examining his body, the medical officers within the army wrote a report stating:

> Having made a careful post-mortem examination of Private Frederick White, of the 7th Hussars, we are of the opinion that he died from inflammation of the pleura and of the lining membrane of the heart; and we are further of the opinion that the cause of death was in no wise [sic] connected with the corporal punishment he received on the 15th June last.[25]

It was the then Vicar of Heston, Henry Trimmer, who, when was told that the cadaver of a soldier was to be buried in the churchyard, became suspicious and started to pose questions to the army officers. The officers responded that the soldier had died of a liver complaint and this contradiction –as in the report they had stated that he had died from inflammation of the pleura and lining membrane of the heart – did not go unnoticed. Moreover, an anonymous source informed the vicar that the deceased soldier had been flogged five weeks earlier. Therefore, Trimmer refused permission for the funeral and notified the fact to the coroner for Middlesex, Thomas Wakley. Wakley had been coroner since 1839 and he had been among the very first surgeons to be appointed coroner in Britain, a government position traditionally taken by lawyers.[26] Facilities and incentives for forensic examinations were made available from 1846 – the same year as the Hounslow inquest - the year of the foundation of the Coroners' Society.[27]

Wakley was a reformer, journalist and ardent anti-flogging campaigner. He was also an able rhetorician. His trials attracted the attention of writers such as Charles

[25] *The Times*, 28 July 1846, p.7.
[26] Geoffrey Rivett, *The Development of the London Hospital System 1832-1982* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.16.
[27] Arthur Keith Mant (ed.), *Taylor's Principles and Practice of Medical Jurisprudence* (New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1984), p.3.

Dickens and William Thackeray.[28] As Ian Burney noted, Wakley used journalism to draw the public's attention to corruption in politics and medicine.[29] The medical journalist had a special relationship with the press, as is shown in his biographies, the most comprehensive being Charles Brook's *Thomas Wakley* (1962). Although he seemed destined from an early age for a career in medicine, as after grammar school he enrolled at St. Thomas and Guy's Hospitals, in 1820 there was an incident that determined his shift from medical to journalistic practice. One morning while he was at home, he was attacked and stabbed by unknown people, and after regaining consciousness he found that those people had set his house on fire. In the weeks preceding this accident he had received anonymous threatening letters implying that he was the masked man who had decapitated the notorious prisoner Arthur Thistlewood. Thistlewood was one of the Cato Street conspirators who had planned to kill members of the British government and who were publicly hanged and then beheaded. As a precaution Wakley decided to increase the insurance for the goods in his house. After the accident there were rumours that he had set the fire himself in order to claim the insurance money. However, at the scene of the incident were a journalist and a teacher of elocution who had witnessed the episode. They published a pamphlet describing all of the events connected with the assault. The circulation of this pamphlet together with a letter sent by the Sheriff of London and Middlesex, who had organised the execution, cleared Wakley of any complicity in the decapitation. However, because of the rumours that he himself had set fire his house on fire the insurance company refused to meet his claim. After this accident Wakley's wife tried to persuade him to leave the city, but he left the profession

[28] Charles Brook, *Thomas Wakley* (London: S. M. A. Publication, 1962).
[29] Burney (2000), op. cit., p.17.

instead; he stayed in the city and in 1823 he founded a medical journal called the *Lancet*. This episode is important because it shows that Wakley, a victim himself of an injustice, knew the importance and power of the role of public opinion and the press in effective expression. Moreover, he was a friend of journalist William Cobbett, who was a source of inspiration to him and with whom he remained in contact until the end of his life.[30] The *Lancet* was an immediate success; it was the general medical weekly with the highest circulation up until 1870, when it was overtaken by its predecessor, the *British Medical Journal*. The *Lancet* reported on lectures delivered by surgeons and denounced maladministration in medical schools and misconduct in hospitals.[31] As a Member of Parliament, Wakley supported the repeal of the stamp duty (1855) and the Sunday opening of galleries.[32] Furthermore, he introduced the first bill proposing the registration of doctors, which led to the Medical Act of 1858. This Act regulated the medical profession and caused increased demand for bodies for dissection.[33] For him the public *post-mortem* examination was crucial to reach a scientifically validated truth, as this chapter will show. In particular, Wakley saw the coronership as the pivot of social reform.[34] In fact, he criticised the incompetence of coroners drawn from the legal profession and promoted the introduction of medical coroners in juridical inquests.

Although he seems never to have publicly spoken about this, Wakley might have witnessed flogging at a very young age, since, when he was ten years old, he

[30] Brook (1962), op. cit., p.34.
[31] Ibid., p.6.
[32] John Hostettler, 'Thomas Wakley. An Enemy of Injustice', *The Journal of Legal History* 5:1 (1984), p.66.
[33] Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Dying for Victorian Medicine. English Anatomy and its Trade in the Dead Poor, c. 1834-1929* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), p.4.
[34] Burney (2000), op. cit., p.17.

was sent to Calcutta on a vessel commanded by a friend of his parents.[35] It might be assumed that when Wakley acknowledged what happened in Hounslow he might have hoped to accomplish what he failed to achieve in 1836. Exactly ten years before the flogging at Hounslow, Wakley saw the body of a man who died after being sentenced to 200 lashes with the cat, at Woolwich barracks. The final verdict in the 1836 case was that the man died of visitation by God, 'and not by the hands of any person or person whatsoever'.[36] This was the occasion where Wakley suggested that a medical coroner would be better equipped to evaluate the case. He complained that the medical witnesses did not examine the back and the spinal marrow. The *Lancet* printed his words:

> And if they did not, how can they dare to allege, in the face of the profession and the public, that the flogging was not the cause of death? If they did not examine the spinal marrow we tell them that their investigation was worse than useless […]. Do these gentlemen believe that the skin covering the spinal marrow may be cut, bruised, and lacerated with perfect impunity? Do they think that there is no sympathy between the skin and the nervous system under such torture?[37]

The Times covered the episode but did not even mention the word 'skin' in its reports. Until the death of John White, the news coverage of flogging did not take into account the physiology of the human organism, in response to whipping. As the *Lancet* pointed out, what was missing from *The Times*' reports was an account of the examination of the skin and the tissues underneath. On that occasion, Wakley tried to raise the issue in the House of Commons, but unsuccessfully: he pointed out that 50

[35] W. F. Bynum, "Wakley, Thomas (1795–1862)", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: OUP), http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.wellcomelibrary.org/view/article/28425 [accessed August 20, 2012].
[36] *Lancet* 25:652 (27 February 1836), p.874.
[37] Ibid., p.876.

lashes could be even worse than the 200 received by the soldier, because this would depend on the length and weight of the cat, the type of thong used, whether it had six or twelve knots and how long the flogging lasted.[38] From the very beginning of the debate on flogging there were divergent opinions on its severity. On the one hand, there were those, mainly employed by the army, who believed that the more lashes inflicted the worse the effects; on the other hand, people from the medical profession suggested that the number of lashes did not matter, as everything depended on the health of the person at the time of the flogging. One decade later the cat was back on the coroner's table but this time the outcome was to be significantly different.

The Times' first piece about the flogging of the soldier at Hounslow was published on 16 July 1846, the day after the inquest was launched. The 1540 word article, titled 'Military Flogging at Hounslow', is divided into two parts. The first one contains an introduction summing up what happened. The second part, subtitled 'The inquest', goes into greater detail, reporting on the first day of the public inquiry. The two parts differ in style; in the former *The Times* explains to the reader how the news from the Hounslow Barracks spread by word of mouth. *The Times* writes that the factual details of the event did not go beyond the barrack walls, so that all the reporters had was rumour and 'report'.[39] Rumours included that the soldier, shortly before expiring, had said: 'I am a murdered man'. *The Times* wrote that the source for this information was confidential. For report *The Times* meant 'oral report', not written documents. The oral transmission of the facts, which preceded the actual coverage of the inquiry, is something *The Times* emphasised. The article says:

[38] John Hostettler, *Thomas Wakley. An Improbable Radical* (Chichester: Barry Rose Law Publishers, 1993), p.119.
[39] *The Times*, 16 July 1846, p.8.

> To day the forthcoming inquiry is the all-absorbing topic of conversation, and it is looked forward to with the greatest anxiety by all well-informed persons as the stepping-stone to the total abolition of the obnoxious system of corporeal punishment in the army.[40]

And just after, it added: 'The above are the reports and statement in circulation, but the real facts will not be publicly known until after the inquest is concluded'. Basically, the newspaper is drawing a link between oral, uncertain statements and those which were to be produced during the inquest. In this way the news coverage of the event appears to be bound up with the inquest's proceedings, which would lead to the more authoritative printed word. This would corroborate Wakley's idea that the coronership was central to social reform. Throughout the coverage it is not the figure of an investigative journalist which emerges, but the figure of a coroner with investigative purposes who was seeking the aid of the press. Therefore the actual coverage of the Hounslow case started with the beginning of the coroner's inquest. The following part of the article is a descriptive and detailed account of the first meeting to inquire into the circumstances attending the death of John White, whose death it was alleged 'has been caused by the effects of the corporal punishment he had received under an order of court martial'.[41] However, the first day of the inquest was delayed by a peculiar discovery.

The story of the missing fragment of skin

During the first day of the inquiry, when the body of John White was carried into the room where the inquest started – a parlour of the George IV public house in Hounslow Heath - it emerged that a large piece of skin was missing from the

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

soldier's back. *The Times* reporter wrote: 'In the middle of the back, between the shoulders, where the greatest inflammation had evidently been, a great piece of skin, nine inches one way, and eight inches the other, had been cut away'.[42] When the coroner, on the first day of the inquest, inquired as to what had happened to the piece of skin, it was suggested that the fragment had been cut away by Dr. Francis Reid, who had performed the first *post-mortem* examination. After a few hours a piece of skin was eventually found but it was not large enough to fit the whole gap on the soldier's back. There was still a substantial portion missing. The coroner stated that the inquiry could have not progressed without finding both Dr. Reid and the remaining piece of skin. When, the day after, *The Times* printed the follow-up of the story it focused on the detail of the missing fragment of skin:

> The excitement occasioned throughout this town and neighbourhood, by the discovery that one of the soldiers at the Hounslow barracks had died from the effects of the excessive flogging he had received, has been increased to a fearful extent since the discovery by the coroner and jury, on viewing the body of the unfortunate deceased, that a great portion of the skin of the back of the victim had been removed, and could nowhere to be found.[43]

The mid-Victorian press generally employed modes of literary fiction in the way it included shocking details and calls for justice and retribution even before a verdict was reached.[44] *The Times* made use of these modes, not only for the shocking detail of the strip of skin, but also because since the second article, a month before the court's pronouncements, the newspaper had established that the army officers were guilty of killing a soldier. At the beginning of this inquest the detail of the missing fragment of skin

[42] *The Times*, 16 July 1846, p.8.
[43] *The Times*, 17 July 1846, p.8.
[44] Judith Knelman, 'Subtly Sensational: a Study of Early Victorian Crime-Reporting', *Journal of Newspaper and Periodical History* 8:1 (1992), p.35.

attracted the interest of the newspapers to such an extent that it could have impaired the outcome of the inquest and the history of the fight against corporal punishment. The lost piece of skin was diverting attention from the main problem, which was to ascertain the connection between flogging and death. The missing fragment of skin would not have demonstrated this connection: the fragment of skin was a direct product of dissection and not of flogging. Paradoxically, in this way, public resentment would have focused on the practice of dissection rather than of flogging. Thomas Wakley was a supporter of the autopsy because he knew it was a very valid tool, not only for medical education, but also for providing legal evidence. However, dissection was then a rather controversial topic because, although a professional could understand its benefits, in the eye of the public it could appear cruel and invasive or at worst, unnecessary.

One of the first consequences of the mystery of the fragment of skin was that a form of rhetoric of the body cut into pieces started to spread throughout the columns of *The Times*, and this trend lasted until the end of the inquest. Here are some instances: the first letter on the Hounslow case published by *The Times* pointed out that in the middle of the nineteenth-century, in England, while the monkey was protected by law a human being had been cut to pieces. It says: 'cut to pieces by a tribunal, itself the prosecutor, judge and jury'.[45] This sounds more like an attack on the legal system than the military as it hints at the *post-mortem* part of the legal procedure. A later editorial published by *The Times*, during the inquest, denounced the atrocities of flogging, suggesting that soldiers should not be cut into small pieces under pretence of slight correction.[46] The rhetoric of the piece of skin also entered the parliamentary debates, via MP John Bowring, who throughout the

[45] *The Times*, 20 July 1846, p.3.
[46] *The Times*, 27 July 1846, p.4.

inquest pushed a proposal for the abolition of flogging, and said: 'We must get rid of it at once and for ever; that not a fragment or a vestige could be any longer tolerated'.[47] This reference to the 'fragment or vestige' could signify either the actual piece of skin belonging to John White or could be a metaphor: the death of John White as a vestige of military punishment. These examples might look like a good way to use the argument of the piece of skin against flogging but they are not, because they do not explain how flogging can kill a human being. It drives emotions that are important for empathising with the victims, but it does not enhance understanding of the functioning of the human body, which provides logical grounds for eradicating the barbaric form of military practice. Furthermore, the media coverage of the piece of skin provided the opportunity to accuse the press of sensationalising the event. In fact, the piece of skin became a counter argument in favour of flogging on at least two different occasions. Before the inquest reached a conclusion, *The Times* reported *verbatim* a Commons debate where Secretary of War Fox Maule accused *The Times* of sensationalism with reference to the piece of skin. In this debate, Maule tried to undermine the credibility of the press by claiming that there was no connection between flogging and death, that the public was being unnecessarily horrified by the story of piece of skin and that the reports exaggerated the story of the flogged soldier who was, according to Maule, rightly punished for insubordination. In particular, Maule referred to rumours that the soldier had been flayed alive. However, although *The Times* highlighted the problem of the missing skin, it never suggested that the skin was removed during the flogging.

The second occasion where the argument of the piece of skin returned with a vengeance was when, after the end of the inquest, Scottish physician George

[47] *The Times*, 8 August 1846, p.2.

Ballingall attacked Wakley and Erasmus Wilson, the surgeon who performed the final examination, in the *Monthly Journal of Medical Science*. Ballingall inferred that a proper analysis of the body could not have been conducted because a piece of skin was missing. As we will see, this was totally wrong. Wilson promptly replied in the columns of the *Lancet* that Sir George could be reassured that the state of the muscles, of which alone he spoke, was fresh, and thus they had maintained all their anatomical characteristics to allow a prompt examination.[48] From the beginning of the inquest, Wakley foresaw the damage that the inferences on the piece of skin could cause, therefore he made great efforts to solve the problem and bring back the attention of the jury, press and public to the whole of John White's body.

The piece of skin was back on the coroner's table on the second day of the inquiry. Dr. Reid was present as Wakley requested. 'Is the skin here?' the coroner asked the summoning officer. At that point a small bottle was brought forward, containing a piece of the skin in spirits. The coroner took the skin out of the bottle and laid it on a paper. 'It resembled a thick piece of buckskin, and was handed by the jury to the end of the reporters' table where the witness Skinner[49] was standing'.[50] The right patch corresponded to the body, but it was no longer inflamed because the skin had been immersed in spirits. Apparently there was still a smaller portion missing. On 28 July, during the third inquest meeting, more clarifications on the piece of skin were provided. Reid explained that he had to remove the skin with the sole intention of seeing the state of the organs underneath, because he noticed it was highly inflamed, and when he inserted a knife into it, it contracted. Then the piece of

[48] The entire correspondence is published in Erasmus Wilson, 'Punishment by Flogging: Reply to the Observations of Sir George Ballingall', *Lancet* 48:1209 (31 October 1846), p.489.
[49] George Skinner was a private of the 7th Hussars examined during the inquest.
[50] *The Times*, 21 July 1846, p.6.

skin was handed to Erasmus Wilson, the third and last surgeon who examined the body. He found that, though shrunk by the effect of the spirits and the gap on White's back having grown, it matched; with the exception of the side nearest the middle line, where a part had been cut away and lost. So there was still a part of the skin missing. It seems that the part had been cut away in order to fit into the bottle. This is what the medical officers in the army said. Wilson removed any possibility of suspicion over that piece of skin because, according to further medical analysis, it was likely to have been less struck by the lashes, therefore being less interesting from a medical point of view. This is important because, at the very beginning, *The Times* said that the greatest inflammation occurred precisely where the skin was missing. This is slightly misleading if proper context is not provided because it suggests that that piece held greater medical evidence than it was later demonstrated to have. Eventually, Thomas Wakley put an end to the story of the missing fragment of skin, making the papers print in clear letters the following statement:

> Upon the first view of the body, by the jury, they had noticed that a large piece of skin had been removed from the back; this observation gave rise to various reports most prejudicial to the character of the officers of the regiment, and which, in reality, were not founded in truth. It had since been distinctly proved that so far from the skin having been removed as it had been said during the life of the man, it was not taken away until after the post-mortem examination had been made; and it was then taken away, not for any bad purpose, but to ascertain what was the condition of the back after the individual had died from having received such a punishment […] had all been open, fair, and public, not one of these mysterious reports or these suspicious rumours would have gone abroad.[51]

[51] *The Times*, 4 August 1846, p.8.

Therefore, once it was established that there was no irregularity linked to the missing fragment of skin, the inquest could move on. Before delving into how *The Times* reported on the connection between wounds from flogging and the death of the soldier, it is possible to formulate a theory about the use of the idea of the fragment of skin in the press.

An argument for the use of the mystery surrounding the missing piece of skin could be that it was a powerful means to attract audiences and create a sensational story. There are a few other stories in *The Times* where there is a presentation of morbid details, such as pieces of skin displaced from the body of the owner. Under the title 'Horrible Occurrence' in 1845 *The Times* recounts a discovery made by a labourer living in a rural district near Worcester. His family could not understand the reason for the presence of an unusual amount of impurities in the water well. Then, on drawing up some water they found a fragment of human skin. They immediately conjectured that it could belong to the feet of an infant, and then, with the aid of a hook, drew a male infant out of the well.[52] A further example was in 1849, when *The Times* published the case of a man in his twenties poisoned by his mother in Sussex. This was a story reprinted from the *Hereford Journal*. It is not necessary here to add the particulars of the inquest, but what is interesting is how the photographic eye of the newspaper's reporter fell on the corpse of the deceased during the funeral. While accompanying the body of the murdered man to the graveyard, the journalist writes that as he was being placed in the coffin a piece of skin came off the back of his neck.[53] The difference between these two examples is that in the former the fragment of skin is necessary to understand the sequence of events in the story. In the latter, it is just a detail that adds sensationalism to the story. Reviews of skin display exhibitions supplied

[52] *The Times*, 3 May 1845, p.8.
[53] *The Times*, 15 May 1849, p.8.

the newspaper with another opportunity to highlight the allure of anatomical parts to an audience. For example, a party held at the Egyptian Hall was followed by a natural science exhibition where the reporter recounted: 'The things, however, which appeared to attract most attention were the feet of spiders, flies and frogs, and the human skin magnified by microscopes, through which the guests had an opportunity of looking'.[54] These stories might have indeed attracted the reader's attention, but they did little to disseminate the knowledge of the functioning of the skin. The discussion of flogging offered instead an opportunity to put the two things together: a public interest story with the promulgation of knowledge about the human body. The dissemination of news involving human anatomy today, is considered central to the issue of how medical researchers and educators engage with the public: it has been found that the contemporary predominant 'frames' in news are 'awe and amazement', 'fear and revulsion', and 'Frankenstein metaphors'.[55] Although these studies refer to twenty-first century news coverage, the same frames are identifiable in the story of the flogged soldier. The reasons why the deployment of these frames is so historically persistent should be explored, as they affect the comprehension of unexplained deaths. There might be cultural reasons rooted in a period antecedent to the Victorian era. The problem is that in this era, far more information found its way into print, so the dissemination of persistent ideas became wider, faster, repetitive and impressive. Mieneke te Hennepe observed that the tension between the representation of the human body as a whole, bearing the character of the individual, and the detached fragment is a constant in the history of medical portrayals of the skin.[56] The cultural history of the body has always been divided into two ideas: a fragmented and a holistic concept.[57] Deborah Harter looked

[54] *The Times*, 5 June 1851, p.5.
[55] Sam R. de Bere and Alan Petersen, 'Out of the Dissecting Room: News Media Portrayal of Human Anatomy Teaching and Research', *Social Science and Medicine* 63:1 (2006), p.76.
[56] Mieneke te Hennepe, *Depicting the Skin. Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Medicine*, PhD dissertation, (University of Maastricht, 2007), p.170.
[57] Bernardette Wegenstein, *Getting under the Skin* (London: The MIT Press, 2006), p.xviii.

at the role of parts of the human body in determining fantastic discourse in narrative by juxtaposing the antithesis between the whole and the fragment with the opposition between realism and the fantastic. In promoting a theory of the poetic fragment Harter reached the conclusion that, in fantastic narrative, the use of the human body in its fragments serves the purpose of showing a sort of 'supernature' within nature itself.[58] Similarly, but in the context of skin specimens exhibited in medical museums, Sam Alberti argued that in the Victorian period diseased bodies were fragmented, circulated, preserved and shown with the aim of creating an air of the abnormal in medical collections.[59] Gowan Dawson, talking about mid-Victorian cultural market-places, explained that popularization in science happens through fragments, as they are an invitation to reconstruct the whole creature they belonged to.[60] For example, this explains why botany and anatomy were not separated as they are today; Victorian illustrated newspapers had many botanical drawings, the common thread of which was a desire to fragment nature as a new way to objectify it.[61] In the case of the flogged soldier the stories constructed around the lost piece of skin (for example the inferences that he was flayed or the piece had been removed to hide something) could actually have prevented the popularization of knowledge about the human body contained in the story, because of the fantasy-driven inferences it triggered. There is a connection between press and fragments. In fact, Alberto Gabriele, in *Reading Popular Culture in Victorian Print*, stated that fragmentation is a product of modernity and that it played a crucial role in the history of periodicals:

> The poetics of fragmentation that reading a periodical reflects emerges in the miscellaneous structure of the period […] Sensational fiction

[58] Deborah Harter, *Bodies in Pieces* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p.28.
[59] Sam Alberti, *Morbid Curiosities. Medical Museums in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.210.
[60] Gowan Dawson, 'Working the Public Up for Science'. Seminar held at Birkbeck forum for nineteenth-century studies on 3 December 2012.
[61] Alberti (2011), op. cit., p.72.

> publicized periodically fragment of narrative where the delaying factor is an essential component of the narrative that create suspense and shocking surprise.[62]

The lost skin was certainly a delaying factor for the Hounslow inquest, but while this might have worked well to attract more readers it did not help the progression of the inquest. The first problem identified by these cultural histories of the idea of the body in fragments is that the fragment creates space for fantasy and imagination. We can think of the power of the relics of saints in the medieval period, which were said to have healing powers. Or we can think of the allure of archaeological specimens or architectural ruins in the Romantic period. Italian philologist Cesare Segre explained that when we contemplate a work of art with a missing part our feelings move between nostalgia for the missing part and euphoric imagination.[63] This is somehow what happened in the case of John White, where a morbid curiosity and excitement developed around the piece of skin that was no longer there. And the attention falls on the 'no longer there' rather than on his body itself, which was able to provide the evidence needed. However, the fragmentation of the story gives a partial version of the facts, and this might not help to consolidate the truth but could lead to missing it.[64] This is what Wakley feared the most after the several attempts he had made to challenge the practice of flogging in the army. The fragment of skin was not directly associated with dermatology or the heart or the lungs, but it was associated with the practice of flaying people alive. It was only with the guidelines given by the coroner

[62] Alberto Gabriele, *Reading Popular Culture in Victorian Print. Belgravia and Sensationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.50.
[63] Cesare Segre, 'Compendi, Estratti, Lacerti della Narrativa medievale Romanza', in Cesare Segre, Carlo Ossola, Domenique Budor (eds.) *Frammenti. Le scritture dell'incompleto* (Milano: Unicopli, 2003), p.21.
[64] Carlo Ossola, 'Non Finito e Frammento: tra Michelangelo e Pascal', in Cesare Segre, Carlo Ossola and Domenique Budor (eds.) *Frammenti. Le scritture dell'incompleto* (Milano: Unicopli, 2003), p.28.

to the press that the focus of the story shifted to the more complex structure of the human body.

On the notion of 'excessive flogging'

In order to follow the development of events it is necessary to step back to 17 July, when *The Times*, before the jury reached a verdict, printed that the soldier had died from the effects of the excessive flogging he had received.[65] The discourse surrounding the concept of 'excess' recurred at steady intervals through the inquest. The problem was: how many lashes are too many for a human being to endure? The actual abolition of flogging in the army in 1881 was preceded by a gradual reduction in the number of lashes given during a military punishment. The 17 July article mentioned that White had never received corporal punishment during the seven years that he was connected to the regiment. The private had only received extra drills and minor forms of punishment. Therefore White's ability to cope with this form of punishment was unknown. What is known is that White might have been prone to heavy drinking, which could have impaired his health. Furthermore, the summer of 1846 was unusually hot, an aspect which could have made his recovery more difficult.[66] When this article was published the inquest had temporarily adjourned, because of the issue of the missing piece of skin. *The Times* employed this delay to explore the grounds on which the argument around 'excessive flogging' was based.

[65] *The Times*, 17 July 1846, p.8.
[66] Allusion to the high temperature was made by H. G. Day, the second surgeon to perform an autopsy on White's body, who stated that 1846 recorded one of the hottest summers in many years with unexpected changes in temperature and that this provoked many inflammatory attacks. In *A Brief Sketch of the "Hounslow Inquest," and of the late trial, 'Wakley versus Cook & Healey; in the Court of Exchequer; with a few remarks by Horatio Grosvenor Day* (London: Kent and Richards, Paternoster Row), p.8.

For this purpose, the conditions in which the soldier was flogged were presented analytically. The soldier was flogged using a ladder rather than a triangle. *The Times* reporter learned from persons present during the punishment that no less than ten privates fainted during the punishment, 'four of whom, two being old soldiers, dropped at the same instant'.[67] The detail of the age of the soldiers who fainted is important because flogging was a common form of punishment. They are old enough to have witnessed similar episodes.[68] Apparently, everything that was happening was not new; it was part of an old tradition of punishment. Another important detail is that the soldier was not heard to say any words during the flogging, apart from a request that the lash should not fall on his neck. Although he did not verbally express pain, the soldiers present said that 'the extreme tension of the muscles and sinews of his arms and face showed the inward struggle with which he was contending'.[69] White's punishment was carried out without any interruption: the person who usually had the power to stop the flogging was the surgeon present, who in this case was Dr. Warren. The surgeon could decide to stop the punishment if he believed it was too much for the soldier to cope with. From the report we learn that after having received the 150 lashes White walked into the hospital himself and remained there for two weeks. His wounds were treated with fomentations and then dressed. *The Times* reported: 'After 10 days after he had quitted his bed, the skin of his back was all

[67] *The Times*, 17 July 1846, p.8.
[68] The publication of this detail of hardened soldiers who cannot stand the sight of blood and pain and 'drop at the same instant' might be a hint of the biased attitude of *The Time*s towards this story. The reporter was not present during the punishment and he was writing about what he claimed to have heard from people in the regiment. Moreover, the unusually hot weather for the season might have weakened the soldiers. In fact, a couple of weeks earlier *The Times*, under the title 'Effects of the late hot weather', reported that a man fainted repeatedly because of the high temperature and then died. However, the truth of the claim that soldiers fainted was confirmed by various witnesses in the following days of the inquest. Private George Sparkes confirmed the story of the fainting and specified that the two soldiers were a corporal and a private. Another private, Richard Cooke, said that around six soldiers fainted and remarked that on these occasions there is always someone who faints. (*The Times*, 21 July 1846). The only uncertainty surrounds the number of soldiers; some certainly collapsed.
[69] *The Times*, 17 July 1846, p.8.

healed'. After his back healed the soldier started to feel a pain in his bowels, then became insensible and at about 8 o'clock on Saturday 11 July he died. The last paragraph of this article implicitly goes back to the idea of 'excessive' and the relative nature of this adjective – how much is excessive? In fact it is said that those who attended the flogging of JohnWhite in the past had witnessed people being sentenced to 300 lashes at least. But it also says that, to those who witnessed the 150 lashes, on the back of Frederick White it appeared as though there had been 300. Sentences of a thousand non-consecutive lashes were common at the end of the eighteenth century. A general of the British Empire, in his *Remarks on Military Law*, wrote:

> It was terrible to see the new, tender skin of the scarcely healed back laid bare again to receive the lash […] I have seen hundreds of men flogged and have always observed that when the skin is thoroughly cut up or flayed off, the great pain subsides.[70]

This statement contrasts with what John Hale, the medical officer within the army who found the soldier dead, affirmed, when he implied that the skin of White healed 'kindly'.[71] Another element to take into consideration when evaluating the severity is the tool used. This was discussed when the inquiry restarted, and promptly *The Times* was there to document it. New details emerged: the cats used to flog White had been bought by a farrier named Critton from the veterinary surgery. Here is a striking contrast between the occupation of a man, the farrier, who cares for horses but is the one who inflicts injury on humans. The observation that human skin is different from the horses' skin had been made one year earlier in the *Glasgow Herald*, in an example discussed in the previous chapter. The article, which was about tools used to

[70] Charles J. Napier, *Remarks on Military Law and the Punishment of Flogging* (London: T. and W. Boone, 1837), p.160-163.
[71] *The Times*, 28 July 1846, p.7.

scrape skin while bathing in the Roman period, observed that the 'strigil' that the Romans used was similar to the iron hoop employed on horses but 'as the human skin is somewhat more delicate than that of a horse, the strigil was provided with a flow of oil'.[72] The difference between human and animal skin had been already spelled out, therefore the act of buying a punishment tool in a shop for animals did not help the public image of the military.

Five whips were brought in and laid on the table in the courtroom. The coroner noticed that two of them had thicker and larger cord and knots.[73] This image of the coroner handling the cat is important, because many people might have not been familiar with the lashes' appearance. This information is corroborated by an article published by the *Lancet* in 1859, 'The Torture of the Lash', according to which the continuation of the barbaric form of punishment was helped by the fact that the lash had never been exhibited publicly. People had no notion of the weight, the number and dimensions of the cat's thongs. People did not have notion of the weight, the number and dimensions of the cat's thongs.[74] Evidently the *Lancet* was referring to the fact that civilians might never have touched one with their hands. The witnesses were not able to say which ones were used during the flogging of White. One of them, soldier George Sparks said: 'Blood appeared between the shoulders before the first 25 were completed […]. Deceased, when the 100 lashes were completed said, 'Lower, lower.'[75] According to another witness called Private Mathewson, White told the farrier to strike lower because the lashes were falling on his neck and in fact the lash cut him up to the roots of his back hair. The reason why the soldier might have said 'Lower' whilst being flogged was explained by Erasmus Wilson (the third surgeon

[72] See p.92.
[73] This is the same remark Wakley made on the occasion of the previous case of flogging in 1836.
[74] 'The Torture of the Lash', *Lancet* 74:1891 (26 November 1859), p.546.
[75] *The Times*, 21 July 1846, p.6.

who viewed White's body) several months later, in the columns of the *Lancet*, in an article reporting the medical history of the case. Wilson clarified that during flogging:

> After a while the function of the cutaneous nerves, as carriers of sensation, is so much injured, that the skin is benumbed, and the pain of the lashes consequently lessened. When this happens, the sufferer complains loudly if the lash fall upon some new places, and, as in White's case, may call out 'lower' when the stroke falls upon his neck.[76]

In the report written by John Hale, the army staff surgeon, it was said that White received the flogging in 'the usual manner' and 'without any degree of severity calculated to attract more than any degree of ordinary attention'.[77] Wakley's interest in understanding the prevailing state of health of the flogged soldier was fulfilled by a witness: Private Richard Cooke.[78] Cooke said that White was considered of delicate constitution 'particularly in the chest'. He added that he had seen flogging for nine years and was of the opinion that the farriers were experienced floggers. The flogging took half an hour. 'The farriers strike as hard as they can strike, and if they did not do so they would be liable to be punished themselves', he explained. Cooke also highlighted that punishment in their regiment was harder than anywhere else because the floggers were farriers, while in other regiments they were trumpeters, i.e. young boys. Farriers, more experienced and stronger, typically struck harder. A pause took place every 25 lashes to hear whether the surgeon or the colonel had something to say, but they did not say anything: 'the colonel stood with his arms folded'.[79]

[76] Erasmus Wilson, 'Punishment by Flogging', *Lancet* 48:1211 (14 November 1846), p.540.
[77] *The Times*, 28 July 1846, p.7.
[78] Sometimes the name was spelt Cooke, sometimes Cook.
[79] *The Times*, 21 July 1846, p.6.

So far it is not clear whether the flogging was excessive, because every witness said that everything that happened was routine. With the evidence of the witness Thomas Pegg, who was in the hospital when White entered, the perception of what was 'excessive' started to change. He is the first person to claim that something was not as usual: '[I] had never before seen a man in that state', he said. Private Pegg observed that White's back was wounded from the nape of the neck to the bottom of the back. The private also noted that the worst part, where the skin was broken and still bleeding, was between the blade bones and the shoulders. 'I can't compare it to anything else but like a person who had been cut to pieces. It was a most severe flogging in my opinion',[80] Pegg told the coroner. So the excessive nature of flogging did not emerge when focusing on the action of flogging, but only by looking at the physical condition of the soldier. The word 'excessive' returned in an article on 28 July during a third adjournment. James Elsworth, a private in the 7th Hussars, stated that Critton, the farrier, was exceedingly severe. The witness also claimed that the adjutant of the second farrier told him: 'Do your duty'. This witness was clearly making the point that the farriers struck harder and that there was much more blood than he had observed in other circumstances. To this observation Sergeant White answered: 'The words of the articles of war are, "according to the custom of war in like cases"'. According to the War Act and the Mutiny Act, punishment should not put at risk life and limb.[81] But there were no written rules on how to flog. For example, the cords sometimes become untied and formed double knots, which increased the pain; the coroner observed that there were no rules regarding this

[80] Ibid.
[81] Hopkins (1977), op. cit., p.179.

problem.[82] The coroner noted that seven out of eight knots were doubled but farrier Critton swore that when he flogged they were single-knotted only: 'White had been flogged just in the same way as other men were flogged'.

There are a few documents testifying that there was in fact a procedure to follow when flogging. A trained flogger was not supposed to break the skin, but because 'performers and skins materially differ, accidents sometime happen'.[83] Usually in reports regarding deaths occurring after flogging, fever or other maladies were suggested as the cause: flogging was hardly mentioned.[84] An example of training for becoming a flogger was summed up by the words of an 'Old Artillery Drummer Boy', the pseudonym with which the letter is signed, who had written in the *Morning Advertiser* years before. He wrote that a tree was used to stand for the body and the flogger was told to 'throw the cast, first to the left, then to the right, and then with a flourish over the head […] At the end of the session the bark of the tree looked like just pulp'.[85] A letter sent to the *Lancet* in September 1846 said that 'a few men are flogged fairly': the consequence of being flogged by inexpert hands was that the lashes, instead of falling into a small area between the shoulders, fall all over the back.[86]

An aside is needed here on the legal meaning of the word 'wound'. In the nineteenth-century legal system, there was a lack of clarity in the definition of 'wound' which affected the direction of inquests, in particular in those where there

[82] At the Museum of London Docklands there is an example of whip used to flog slaves where the formation of knots is evident.
[83] E. Livingston Prescott (Pseud.), *Flogging not Abolished. A Reasonable Inquiry into the Present Abuse of the "CAT" and BIRCH in Our Military Prisons* (London: A. Bachhoffner, 1897), p.2.
1897), p. 2.
[84] Scott (1950), op. cit., p.86.
[85] *Morning Advertiser*, 1 September 1832; in Scott (1950), op. cit., p.84.
[86] W. I. Gorringe, 'Surgical Treatment after Flogging', *Lancet* 48:1202 (12 September 1846), p.304.

was a period of time between the cause of death and the actual death. Medical jurist Alfred Taylor, one of the leading authorities in nineteenth-century medico-legal cases, in his handbook of medical jurisprudence explained that for a wound to be considered as such the skin should be always broken or injured. However, those who stuck to this definition omitted to consider as wounds the burns produced by heated metals or corrosive liquids. Because of this omission many people who committed serious offences managed to avoid legal action:

> The present rule appears to be, that no injury constitutes a wound in law, unless the continuity of the skin be broken; so that in a case in which blows were inflicted with a hammer or iron-instrument sufficient to break the collar-bone, and violently bruise but not break the skin, it was held not to be a wounding within the statute.[87]

The wounds caused by flogging would fall in the category of indirectly fatal, according to a distinction made by Taylor. He wrote that wounds 'indirectly fatal' are usually followed by inflammation, suppuration, gangrene or tetanus; the bearer survives for a certain period and then dies.[88] Taylor used military flogging and the Hounslow case itself as an example. He clarified that an individual may receive blows or stripes that would not themselves be considered lethal from a medical point of view. However, Taylor explained that a person who receives this type of injury can die directly from the consequences of the violence. In the second edition of the *Manual of Medical Jurisprudence* (1879), Taylor insisted that one of the problems that juries and surgeons may face when examining wounds is the extent to which they are dangerous to life, and this, as the Hounslow inquest will demonstrate, is entirely dependent on the professional knowledge of the witnesses.[89] What the

[87] Alfred S. Taylor, *Manual of Medical Jurisprudence* (London: Churchill, 1854), p.201.
[88] Ibid., p.261.
[89] Alfred S. Taylor, *Manual of Medical Jurisprudence* (London: Churchill, 1879), p.198.

discussion surrounding the problem of 'excess' suggested was that flogging is unfair precisely because its effect is unpredictable. There are too many variables linked to it: force of the floggers, type of whips, number of knots, external temperature, the physical and psychological state of the victim. As the inquest demonstrated, these variables were not regulated in any way by martial law. Therefore, the boundary between disciplinary measure and fatal punishment was blurred.

Not only skin deep

To sum up, the inquiry commenced on 15 July. It was delayed because of the inferences stirred up by the absence of a piece of skin. On 21 July a second meeting was held and the mystery of the missing piece of skin was solved. Several witnesses, the other soldiers, started to recount what they saw. *The Times* recorded great public interest across people of all classes attending the inquiry. Wakley entreated the jury to dismiss from their minds whatever they heard elsewhere and to be guided, not by their feelings about the practice of flogging, but by the evidence.[90] This was very much in Wakley's style: creating pauses of reflection and addressing the attention of those he was speaking to. These pauses are important because they play a role that was to be assumed at the end of the century by the press with the development of investigative journalism. Thomas Wakley told the press, via the way he structured the inquest, exactly what to focus on, what to ignore and how to recount the story.

During the second adjournment it emerged that a week before White's death Dr. Warren, the military surgeon who was present when he was flogged, asked the soldier: 'How are you White'? Firstly he made no answer and then said: 'This is

[90] *The Times*, 21 July 1846, p.6.

through the lash that has caused my illness'.[91] Dr. Warren is said not to have examined him properly, just looked superficially at his back after pulling up his shirt. It seems that Dr. Warren and Colonel White, when noticing the deterioration of the soldier, called Sir James McGrigor, Director General of the Army Medical Services. McGrigor then instructed staff surgeon Dr. Hall to see the soldier, but he arrived just in time to confirm his death. A cursory *post-mortem* examination was then conducted by Dr. Hall, Dr. Warren and Dr. Read. In the report produced, they stated that the skin was healed and that there was evidence of previous pulmonary and cardiac disease. Between the first and second session of the inquest Wakley decided to appoint a surgeon external to the army to examine White's body a second time. The choice was Dr. Horatio Grosvenor Day, a locally-known sanitary reformer and surgeon from Isleworth. This examination proved to be useless because apparently Day misunderstood Wakley and omitted to look at the spine. Day himself, in order to clarify his position a few years later, recounted:

> He (Dr. Warren) then asked us to have a glass of wine in the mess room after the disagreeable duty we had been performing; we consequently adjourned there for a few minutes, and I then, for the first time, saw the account in The Times newspaper, of the occurrences of the previous evening.[92]

The duty was disagreeable because Day thought that a second *post-mortem* examination was unjustified and probably ineffective, given the bad state of the organs. Day was clearly annoyed by *The Times*' coverage because it presented him as someone who failed to do what seemed to be obvious. Therefore the figure of Day

[91] Ibid.
[92] Horatio Grosvenor Day, *A Brief Sketch of the "Hounslow Inquest," and of the late trial. 'Wakley versus Cook & Healey; in the Court of Exchequer; with a few remarks by Horatio Grosvenor Day* (London: Kent and Richards, Paternoster Row, 1849), p.5.

is ambiguous and weak at the same time, because Wakley promptly appointed another surgeon to do what he had requested: to look under the skin. The physical presence of *The Times* newspaper, which was on the table in the mess room, somehow interrupted the enjoyment of a glass of wine after the 'daunting' task of dissecting a flogged private.

Henry Potter was a hospital sergeant present when the soldier died on 11 July. He recounted that during the fourteen days White spent in the hospital his back healed promptly. So, the skin looked fine but the soldier complained of a pain on the left side, which then moved to his bowels.

> Witness George Skinner was then heard, he said: 'Saw his back; it appeared skinned over but seemed inflamed about the half breadth of my hand in each shoulder-blade […] when the doctor came and asked him how he felt, deceased said he felt a singular pain in his left side - a pain which shot through to his back'.[93]

The last witness heard that day, 20 July, was a private who had been given 100 lashes for insolence to his sergeant, who was named as John Mathewson. He was in the hospital next to White. Mathewson recalled that Dr. Warren did not put his ear to or tap the deceased's chest. Later on, the coroner, pointing out that there was no medical guidance for the practice of flogging remarked: 'Nothing is said about the mode in which a man is to be examined who is to undergo a court-martial, whether he is to be stripped, or examined with the stethoscope'.[94] Mathewson was an important witness because he was a soldier who had endured the pain of flogging but was still alive, therefore he could testify. The soldier told the jury how it feels to have the back flogged. This soldier experienced the same problems as White: boils,

[93] *The Times*, 21 July 1846, p.6.
[94] *The Times*, 4 August 1846, p.8.

pain on his side, back and chest. Mathewson was flogged by the same farriers. Soldiers usually must remove their stock from the neck but this soldier kept it on, which, although it was only fabric, would have provided some protection for his skin. At the end of the session the coroner argued that it would have been worthwhile having a look again at the spine of John White. White was exhumed and examined for the third time. Day said that this was not necessary as he had seen enough to explain his death, but Wakley was convinced that the truth could only be revealed by looking at the spine and at the muscles underneath. So the inquiry was adjourned to the following Monday to give time for Mr. Day and a newly-appointed dissector, Erasmus Wilson, to look at White's spine.

On 23 July 1846, in an article titled 'The Military Flogging at Hounslow', Dr. Erasmus Wilson made his appearance for the first time. Wilson was an important dermatologist and philanthropist of the time.[95] His expertise was in dermatology but his ability as a dissector had emerged during his training at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Wakley and Wilson knew one another long before the inquest. Wilson had trained Wakley's son in anatomy.[96] It is through the figure of Wilson that the *Lancet* started to promote dermatology. In common with Wakley, Wilson had an eclectic and innovative personality. They were both keen on the popularization of medical science. Wakley recognized a talent in Wilson and made him sub-editor of the *Lancet* in 1840. Also, it seems that Wakley himself pushed Wilson to develop his expertise in the dermatological field.[97] Like Wakley, Wilson had very clear purposes that informed his career - i.e. popularizing medical knowledge among non-experts.

[95] For more information about Erasmus Wilson see p.101.
[96] Brook (1962), op. cit., p.98.
[97] R. M. Hadley, 'The Life and Works of Sir William James Erasmus Wilson 1809-84', *Medical History* 3:3 (1959), p.9.

As stated before, Thomas Wakley played a key role in directing the news coverage of the inquiry towards the issues that interested him. Wilson helped to direct attention to the skin.

The decision to appoint Wilson might be challenged, as it seems to indicate clear bias on the part of the coroner. After the end of the inquest, the *Medical Times* accused the two, Wakley and Wilson, of lacking impartiality, as a result of which Wakley denounced the proprietor and publisher of the journal.[98]

The inquest proceedings reported by *The Times*' journalists highlight the relationship between the coroner and the press. On the other hand, editorials and letters published in between the four adjournments were the spaces where *The Times* expressed its editorial policy overtly. As Matthew Rubery pointed out, the leading article or editorial had been the most authoritative form of journalism since the beginning of the nineteenth-century, and in an era where media outlets were not widespread as they are today they will have held great influence for *The Times* reader.[99] In an editorial *The Times* suggested that this story was creating a unanimous condemnation of the army:

> In spite of every attempt to smother inquiry and suppress its results - the reporters of the press have succeeded in giving to the world a detailed account of everything connected with this unhappy transaction, true in every essential point save one. We hope that neither of them [the colonel or the surgeon] knew or suspected that the deceased soldier was in a state of health which made his punishment tantamount to death […] We will not for an instant suppose that any commanding officer or any surgeon in the whole army would authorize, witness, and defend, the infliction of a penalty which in their hearts they felt to be murder.[100]

[98] *A Brief Sketch* (1849), op. cit., p.9.
[99] Matthew Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.85.
[100] *The Times*, 23 July 1846, p.4.

The editorial, which was a reply to Fox Maule, underlined that these events were happening in an age, the nineteenth-century, 'which prides itself on its notions of humanity', and then summed up the main traits of the occurrence with this rhetorical device, an anacoluthon:

> The nailed ladder - the kneeling man – the quick time-the change of farriers – the uplifted and renewed lash – the bleeding and putrefying wounds - the suppressed agony – the fainting comrades - the composed commandant, and the placid surgeon.[101]

This rhetorical expedient, which echoes the style of popular ballads, condenses the story, highlighting a painful antithesis. We have the contrast between the fixed ladder and the bending man; the dramatic difference is highlighted between an inanimate object and a human. Then there is the agility of the farriers and their calculated interchange to make sure the floggings did not lose power. Then there are the lashes that almost seem to become alive, while the soldier is about to become an inanimate object. Finally, there is the doctor and colonel's behaviour at the scene, with their apparent composure and tranquillity questioned in the aftermath.

In order to give an idea of the readership's response to the story, on 28 July *The Times* printed that the paper was regretting it could not publish the almost 700 letters received in the last week on the case of the soldier flogged at Hounslow, and could only publish barely a fifth of them. If this number is accurate, it demonstrates the widespread public reaction stirred by the events at Hounslow. In the Victorian period, the frequent publication of letters to the editor demonstrates that there was a high level of interaction between newspapers and readers. The response of the readers to editors

[101] Ibid.

and journalists gave them an idea of main trends and interests. As Bob Nicholson pointed out:

> This was a constant, cyclical process and over time the tastes and identities of readers were gradually inscribed into the paper. We can therefore view these papers as valuable sources for the exploration of popular values, tastes and attitudes.[102]

In any case, it confirms that *The Times* was keen on creating further noise about the case. The same day a letter titled 'The physiology of flogging' anticipated the crucial role that Wilson was about to play in the inquest in establishing the correlation between flogging and death. The letter, unsigned, said that lashes and any other kind of superficial lacerations affect the power of the heart: 'The skin, which some persons seem to think may be treated like an inorganic substance, has a special relation to the internal organs'.[103] The commentary proceeded by saying that air falling on the surface is sufficient to cause inflammation of the lungs or the heart, through the ganglion cells, and as this inflammation may be caused by burns or scalds, flogging too may affect the internal organs in this way. This letter, evidently written by an expert, added that the severity of the consequences was not linked to the length of the punishment but to the constitution of whoever received the lashes. Unhealthy people suffer the effects of the lash more than healthy ones, a drunk might suffer more than a sober man, and in any case nobody can anticipate who is going to suffer and who is not.[104] And this puts an end to the question of how much flogging is too much. The author of the editorial pointed out that the relationship between flogging and diseases and flogging and death had not yet been investigated in the medical profession. Flogging, according to the

[102] Bob Nicholson, '"You Kick the Bucket; We do the Rest!": Jokes and the Culture of Reprinting in the Transatlantic Press', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17:3 (2012), p.283.
[103] *The Times*, 28 July 1846, p.6.
[104] Ibid.

piece, may cause injuries to the brain and the heart, and in some cases induce epilepsy and tetanus. 'Flogging is not to be treated of, then, as a thing skin-deep'. Eventually, the author of the missive claimed that the doctors did not measure White's pulse the morning after the flogging, neither did they use the stethoscope after two weeks when, although his back was healed, he complained of a pain in his left side.

On 27 July the court adjourned for the third time. The main theme of the inquest was narrowing down towards linking flogging with disease, therefore with death. Military doctors refused to establish this link, though they were not able to provide the cause of the death of the soldier, but the coroner openly expressed his doubts. When Dr. Wilson was called to testify he presented himself as a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, lecturer on anatomy and physiology, with works written on diseases of the skin and a treatise published in 1845 on healthy skin. He read his observations taken during the *post-mortem* examination. Wilson paid special attention to White's back and spine and noted the presence of the marks of lashes not mentioned so far. Wilson also mentioned the large gap found between the shoulders, then came back to the marks by describing them. He said that after cutting into one of the red marks he found that the redness was an indication of inflammation extending through the entire substance of the skin. He then went on to say that the interior of the spine was in an extreme state of disorganization. Wilson found no indications of disease, but a great state of the organs' disorganization.

Here the contrast emerged between the integrity of the skin - 'it was all healed' - and the state of disorder and decomposition underneath. In particular Wilson found what he called 'pulpy softening of the muscles' and speculated on the cause of the softening. He considered whether there was a link between the

disorganization of the organs and the disease of the chest and came to the conclusion that the softening was due to the excessive contraction of the muscles during the flogging. He used the word 'excessive', referring here not to the excessive lashes, but to the excessive reaction of the body. Wilson explained that the contractions would produce laceration followed by inflammation of the muscles. The inflammation, instead of being reparative, would, in consequence of the depressed state of the powers of the nervous system of the sufferer, be of the disorganized kind that resulted in pulpy softening. Inflammation of the chest was ascribed to cold and moral depression.[105] The clue was connecting the lashes to the disorganization of the muscles. Dr. Day, when re-examined, denied this connection. Colonel White said he had never before seen someone flogging so lightly, referring to one of the farriers.

On 29 July there was important news from the House of Commons: Thomas Estcourt proposed to start investigating all the floggings that had taken place in the army between 1840 and the present (1846) indicating such details as the type of offence, the regiment, where they were stationed, number of lashes given, consequences of flogging, whether the punishment was inflicted by drummers or farriers, copy of a surgeon's certificate, and whether the trial was public or restricted to the regiment.

On 31 July a reader from Truro sent a letter to *The Times* which included an extract from a series of lectures delivered by English surgeon John Abernethy. These were remarkable, according to the author of the letter, for being not only instructive but also morally and theologically striking.[106] The analogy was drawn between

[105] *The Times*, 28 July 1846, p.7.
[106] Erasmus Wilson used to attend John Abernethy's anatomical lectures at St. Bartholomew's Hospital as well.

incising the skin with a lash and incising it with a knife for a surgical operation. The surgeon stressed the necessity of treating the skin with extreme care because it is a very sensitive organ and therefore the incision must be carried out in the safest possible conditions.[107] The author was of the opinion that members of the army should have attended those lectures in order to understand how a human body works. The surgeon stated that the incision must be carried out within minutes and a comparison is established with the soldier whose punishment carries on for hours. '[…] and every lash, until the sensibility of the parts may have been destroyed with their texture, was, perhaps, equivalent to the incision through the skin in the operation to which I have alluded'. He mentioned cases of men flogged in the navy with 2,000 or 3,000 lashes, responding to those in the army who claimed that nobody ever died from the effects of flogging, 'The fact is that death usually followed by slow degrees, and by disorder of the constitution, after the lacerated parts themselves may have been in a manner healed'. Hale Thomson, a surgeon at Westminster Hospital recalled that he once amputated the limb of a soldier and he was surprised that the patient did not complain at all; the soldier told him 'Oh, sir, this is nothing to 150 lashes.' As Hopkins underlined, an amputation of a limb takes one minute, the flogging of White lasted half an hour.[108] In another letter titled the 'Physiology of Flogging', published on 1 August, the writer explained that if you put the fingers on the patient's pulse, you find that at each lash the pulse falters. 'The man may brave it out, may suppress all expression of pain under this modern torture; but, Sir, his heart, both physically and psychically, *quails* under it, and the pulse tells the tale'. He then

[107] *The Times*, 31 July 1846, p.3.
[108] Hopkins (1977), op. cit., p.206.

added: ‘The lacerations had been made through the skin, but the nerve and blood connexions of that skin had carried their influence deeper!’[109]

The editorial published on 1 August is an answer to the letter of a reader who considered the accident in Hounslow a solitary case. ‘Minos’, the author of this letter, made an observation regarding the sight of blood. He said that everyone could faint at the sight of blood, so the number of soldiers that fainted – no less than ten - was not an argument to highlight the severity of the punishment. *The Times*’ response was:

> That this was a terrible one is beyond a doubt; but we spoke with reference, not only to the particular disclosures it has occasioned, but also to those fearful pages of analogous details which military history so copiously supplies.[110]

In order to make it clear once again that the Hounslow case was not a unique case of flogging followed by death, the newspaper also published a letter sent by a student on this matter. The anonymous author of the letter used the words of Arthur Wilson, a senior physician at St. George’s Hospital who published a work titled ‘On spasm and other muscular disorders’ (1843). The extract from this work was about a marine, at Chatham barracks, who received 138 lashes, and died after 15 days. It seems that malignant tumours appeared in the cicatrices. ‘In certain states of bodily health, and at certain times and seasons, no local injury is too slight for the production of tetanus in its most severe constitutional forms’.[111]

[109] *The Times*, 1 August 1846, p.8.
[110] *The Times*, 1 August 1846, p.4.
[111] *The Times*, 4 August 1846, p.7.

4 August 1846 marked the end of the inquest. The *Times* published the latest on the outcome of the inquiry. It emerged that on 25 June, White wrote a letter to his brother after a long period of silence. The content of the letter proved to the jury that White was very depressed and demoralised. In the letter he complained of feeling unwell, of feeling disgusted with the service, that he had lost his confidence, and at times he felt he was approaching lunacy. This was one of the few occasions where the soldier was not treated like a body to dissect but as a person. Then the medical witnesses were heard again and the attention shifted to the body again. Mr. Day still disagreed with Wilson that the inflammation of the pleura could be caused by muscular disorganization. The coroner said: 'But is not a fact, Mr. Day, that a formation of mattery substance connected with the veins of the skin is often the cause of inflammation of the lungs?'[112] For Mr. Day this was not the case. Dr Warren said during the inquest: 'Had I found him faint during the flogging, I would have ordered him to be taken down'. This was the answer to the necessity of feeling the pulse, Warren himself admitted knowing that an intermittent pulse shows a greater state of danger than even fainting, but he said he had no instructions on such occasions. Even Dr. Hall denied that the inflammation of the heart, lungs and pleura that the soldier died of were to be connected to the punishment, and added sarcastically '[nor do I] subscribe to the novel doctrine of Mr. Wilson'. He said:

> […] had Mr. Wilson ever witnessed the infliction of corporal punishment he would have seen that it is the superficial layers of muscles which attach the shoulder-blades of the spine that are thrown into action, and had any rupture would most likely have occurred amongst those, and not among the deeper-seated ones along the spine,

[112]*The Times*, 4 August 1846, p.8.

> which have such limited contractile power, and are so well protected from injury.[113]

This is exactly the misleading idea of the skin as a protective layer of the human body that needed to be eradicated in order to understand that flogging could be a fatal punishment. It was going to be up to Erasmus Wilson to explain to the jury that widespread injuries to the skin are likely to produce internal irritation. Wilson concluded:

> Heretofore it has been considered that the injuries resulting from flogging are confined to the skin, but I have given evidence that in this case, the flogging was followed by a pulpy, softening and deranged state of the muscles.[114]

Three *post-mortem* examinations were carried out. The first two were cursory. The third was more in-depth and through this one the dissector, Wilson, was able to show the connection between surface and depth. The jury concluded that White died from the effects of the flogging. The conclusions drawn from the observations of White's back and the organs beneath it demonstrated that there was a vital communication between outside and inside. This link emerged only when an expert on skin was called to perform the examination. This was the verdict of the jury:

> Frederick John White died on the 11th of July, 1846, from the mortal effects of the severe and cruel flogging which he received on the 15th day of June, in the cavalry Barracks, Hounslow.

On returning the verdict the jury expressed horror and disgust towards the punishment of flogging. The jury also called upon the public to send petitions to the British legislature for the abolition of this form of military punishment.

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[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

Follow-up: the medical journals and lay press

During the weeks following the end of the inquiry, the medical debate on the flogging of White moved from the lay press to the columns of the *Lancet*. There the whole story was told again from a strictly medical point of view. As the *Lancet* explained, what happened to White was that, while the damaged skin fully recovered, an internal state of inflammation appeared. During the inquiry, most of the people involved in the army failed to understand that the skin is an organ:

> It should be remembered in the physiology of military flogging, that the skin is an organ, at all times vital in the body, - a gland discharging, like the lungs and the kidney, a constant necessary function of excretion; and thus by its diseases and injuries, indirectly influencing the whole animal economy.[115]

A few weeks after the end of the trial the *Manchester Times and Gazette* published an article in order to promote the maintenance of a healthy skin. It established a very clear connection between the value of the skin, flogging and Wilson's intervention when it said:

> The examination of Mr. Erasmus Wilson before the Coroner's Jury in the case of flogging to death at Hounslow, in which he showed the fatal effects of laceration of the skin, having directed public attention to his valuable treatise to its functions, we subjoin an extract, deserving the attention of all who desire to enjoy the blessing of health.[116]

What is interesting here is how a connection is established between two issues which, at least in terms of tone and register of the article, appear very distinct from

[115] J. A. W. 'Military Flogging and its Effects on the Blood', *Lancet* 48:1199 (22 August 1846), p.216.
[116] *Manchester Times and Gazette*, 21 August 1846.

one another. There is a clear declaration of the fact that the flogging at Hounslow gave the opportunity to bring information about the physiology of the skin to public attention. *The Times* often returned to the flogging issue in subsequent years. In 1853 it printed an editorial recalling the facts that happened at Hounslow seven years earlier, recalling the personal engagement the paper had with the issue. On that occasion a letter sent subsequently mentioned that as few as 25 lashes could mark a soldier for life, and a soldier who had received lashes would not dare to take his shirt off, being afraid of showing the punishment.[117] It terminated by saying that flogging destroys the spirit of a man, echoing the words of Oliver Cromwell quoted before the facts of Hounslow. Several subsequent articles kept the focus on the connection between skin and internal organs. In 1891, a lecture published by *The Times*, delivered at the Congress of Hygiene, focused on another point that did not emerge during the Hounslow case, which is that when the skin is broken the air enters the wound, bringing germs with it.[118] This dimension was not discussed because the germ theory of disease had not been demonstrated at the time of White's death.

In later years attention started to focus on antiseptic dressing for wounds. Under the heading 'The Greatest Discovery of the Age' there was discussed the new antiseptic treatment of disease. The author pointed out that many people still did not fully understand the dangers of microbes and that a little scratch from a thorn or the bite of a fly can result in fatal consequences such as blood poisoning.[119]

[117] *The Times*, 3 October 1853, p.7.
[118] *The Times*, 15 August 1891, p.7.
[119] *The Times*, 3 September 1895, p.5.

From the Hounslow case, only the heroes are still remembered: John White, whose grave can be found in the graveyard of St. Leonard's Church at Heston. Thomas Wakley and Erasmus Wilson maintained a strong connection with the press throughout their life. Little is known about what happened to the surgeons in the army. The only available information is that the colonel who awarded the punishment, Colonel Whyte, was later moved to a cavalry regiment in India.[120] Less than one week after the end of the inquest *The Times* announced that the Duke of Wellington had established a limit of fifty lashes for corporal punishment. This event led to the formation of the Flogging Abolition Society whose first meeting was chaired by Thomas Wakley in August 1846. When the practice was legally abolished in 1881 few people knew it was still law. Corporal punishment in the navy was finally abolished in England in 1967.

Conclusion

The death of Private John White sparked off a strong public reaction leading to extensive national and provincial press coverage, circulation of pamphlets and ballads, the formation of an anti-flogging society and modification of the Mutiny Act. Eventually flogging in the army was abolished. However, *The Times* especially managed to maintain a focus on the skin, namely on the wounds generated by flogging, actively participating in the dissemination of a medical understanding of the functioning of the human body under physical and psychological stress. Therefore, generalizations about flogging or generic feelings of empathy, or antipathy or personal opinions, could henceforth be silenced by a simple fact.

[120] Information retrieved from St Margarets Community Website http://www.stmgrts.org.uk/archives/2010/01/the_disgraceful_affair_at_hounslow.html [Accessed 24 February 2012].

Flogging affects the functioning of internal organs, although it may appear limited to the skin only; the body of a soldier was there to prove it. The argument sustained by the military that flogging was a punishment restricted to the skin could no longer be accepted. The shift in the popular understanding of the skin highlighted by the press was that the skin was no longer conceived as a removable cloth or envelope of the human body: it was systematically connected with the rest of the body. The press acted both as a medium for the transmission of medical knowledge and an active agent in the social campaign. The key elements of the news coverage of the flogging at Hounslow were four. The first were the public *post-mortem* examinations. Through the three forensic examinations that were performed on the body of White, the connection between superficial wounds and internal organs was demonstrated. Furthermore, the figure of the dissector was restored in the eyes of the public as a crucial character in inquests into apparently inexplicable deaths. The second element was *The Times*' reports of the inquest's proceedings. In these the figure of Thomas Wakley emerged, who directed attention to the legal evidence, thus forcing the press to divert the attention from the most sensationalistic and spectacular elements of the story, such as the missing fragment of skin. The third element was letters and editorials in which *The Times* and its readers expressed their opinion and debated the vulnerability of the human skin. The final element was the figure of Erasmus Wilson, employed once again by the press after the Sanitation movement with the purpose of explaining in plain language the properties and functioning of the skin to the lay public. As we will see in the next chapter the absence of some of these ingredients, namely Thomas Wakley and Erasmus Wilson, could undermine the dissemination of medical knowledge and the effectiveness of a social campaign.

This chapter has contended that *The Times*, above all the newspapers which covered the episode, as the combined keyword-based search confirmed, was the publication which recognized in the skin the most efficient tool to elicit readers' empathy towards the injustice of corporal punishment. The newspaper, by calling attention to the validity of an analytical study of the skin, also called attention to the validity of the journalistic practice. Both fields at that time were fighting to gain public credibility. The main outcomes of this feedback loop were two: first, it challenged the common understanding of the skin as an impenetrable barrier and envelope of the human body. Secondly, the medical analysis of the flogged skin, by revealing the intimate connection between external surface and internal organs, fostered the argument against military corporal punishment, leading ultimately to its abolition. *The Times* integrated within its columns both the popular dissemination of knowledge of human anatomy and the social campaign against corporal punishment.

Chapter 5. The Skin of the Pauper Tells a Story

The practice of whipping beggars and putting a badge on poor people had been a common custom at least since the sixteenth century.[1] Three centuries later, at the time which is the object of this thesis' investigation, it was still in use. During the nineteenth century Britain was still looking for solutions to poverty: a problem which was then exacerbated by a series of factors. The rapid urbanization produced by the industrial revolution, population growth, the increased number of people in search of work, overcrowding, the transformed living conditions and shortage of housing were among the key elements to play a role in one of the most typical problems of the Victorian era. Urban centres were troubled by issues such as child labour, food shortage and poor sanitary conditions. In London, for example, pauperism dramatically grew at the beginning of the 1840s and doubled between 1850 and 1870. The poor were seen as people without morality and discipline and as a threat to law-abiding citizens.[2]

There is a striking analogy between skin disease and poverty in the nineteenth century. In each case, their causes were ascribed to character defects. Being ill was also a crime for poor people because a disease could prevent them from working, adding weight to boroughs' and districts' expenses. The pauper with his cutaneous conditions, the offender with his crime's brand tattooed on his skin, and the invalid with the marks of disease and neglect on his body, shared the stigma of being unsuitable for society and therefore liable to be pushed out of the parish. The apparent solution to the problem of

[1] Norman Longmate, *The Workhouse* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p.14.
[2] Lynn Hollen Lees, *Poverty and Pauperism in Nineteenth-Century London* (Leicester: Victorian Studies Centre, 1988), p.10-11.

poverty came in 1834 when the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed by Parliament. *The Times* reported this news as 'The most flagrant example of injustice in the history of the British legislature'.[3] One of the aims of this reform was to reduce the cost of poverty by abolishing outdoor relief, a form of financial assistance to the poor individual. The two principles of the Poor Law Commission that preceded the Act were to reduce the size of families dependent on relief and stop the practice of hiring out the poor as labourers on wages that undercut more skilled workers. One of the effects was that a high number of unemployed workers moved from rural areas to towns. Workhouses were established in each union or area, based on the principle that by making living conditions harsher, people would be discouraged from entering. Under the New Poor Law, workhouses became, for deprived people, the only alternative to beggary, charity, crime or famine.[4] In essence, the three main objectives for the New Poor Law Commissioners were: to look after the elderly, infirm and children; to discourage the unemployed from entering the workhouse, and to decrease the poor rate by pushing the pauper into the workhouse.[5] Together with the Anatomy Act (1832), the Poor Law Reform, by allowing the workhouses to hand over any unclaimed corpses to be studied by the medical profession, imposed the definitive stigma of poverty.[6]

The Times' condemnation of the new Poor Law was criticised by a great number of ministers on Brougham, Cumbria: they apparently had a violent argument at Brook's Whig Club in London with *The Times*' editor Thomas Barnes. Both *The Times*, the most significant upper and middle class newspaper of the time, and Cobbett's *Political Register*,

[3] *The Times*, 25 August 1834, p.2.
[4] John Pemble, 'So Very Silent', *London Review of Books* 34:20 (2012), p.10-12.
[5] Simon Fowler, *Workhouse. The People, the Places, the Life behind Doors* (Kew: National Archives, 2007), p.44.
[6] Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Dying for Victorian Medicine. English Anatomy and its Trade in the Dead Poor, c. 1834-1929* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), p.4.

which was aimed at the working class, created a firm opposition to the law, although they were unable to stop it.[7] In the years following the introduction of the workhouse system, *The Times*' editor John Walter, who was also a Tory Member of Parliament for Berkshire, campaigned against the Poor Law Commission reporting in detail each case of abuse, almost as if it was a personal crusade.[8] Simon Fowler argued that the workhouse was an 'emotive subject' which improved newspapers' circulation but the editorial comment was mostly in favour of the existing state of affairs. Newspapers' readers could have been sympathetic but unwilling to pay more rates, particularly if, as said earlier, pauperism was seen in the collective imagination as the fault of the individual.[9] *The Times*' editorial mentioned above, which appeared in the aftermath of the New Poor Law, compared the political decisions impacting upon the poor with the behaviour of beggars who pinch the flesh of their children, instead of their own, in order to raise a cry which may procure a few pennies.[10] This analogy shows how the body of the poor person was to become the site for debating the effects of this new law on society. Attention to the morbid details of human anatomy was a means for the press to create inferences about and critique of the Poor Law Commission. For instance, under the title 'New scheme for maintaining the poor', miscellany periodical *Blackwood's Magazine,* in 1838, published an ironic piece circulating the information that tanned skins of dead indigents could be used to bind official registers to save money.[11]

This chapter argues that as the poor were a matter of public concern, their skin became the concrete object through which to address social preoccupations. The

[7] Longmate (2003), op. cit., p.58.
[8] Ian Anstruther, *The Scandal of the Andover Workhouse* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1973), p.20.
[9] Fowler (2007), op. cit., p.225.
[10] *The Times*, 25 August 1834, p.2.
[11] 'New Scheme for Maintaining the Poor', in *Blackwood's Magazine* 43:270 (1838), 489-493.

news coverage of the various ailments affecting the skin acted as a forum in print for the debate on the condition of indigent people inside and outside the workhouses. It would underplay the possibilities of the press at that time to say that the stories of how those marks were generated were only used to mobilize public opinion. Talking about the wounds of poor people was intended to deepen the knowledge of the skin. It does not matter if the information about the skin provided by the press was scientifically based or not: the reports were not addressed to the scientific community. What is important is that the newspapers were one of the tools to increasing awareness of the complexity of the human skin and its relationship to the rest of the body. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the stories prompted by the press initiated the popular discussion of the multi-layered structure of the skin and its vertical connection with other organs. This new understanding implied a new idea of the relationship between 'surface and visible' and 'depth and invisible', in an era where the categorization and treatment of people were mostly dictated by a superficial judgment: the evaluation of appearance. As we will see in this chapter, the newspapers, in particular *The Times*, once again after the flogging case, took a special interest in cases of deaths apparently caused by untreated bed-sores. As in the chapter about flogging, the news coverage of the skin was channelled into a social campaign. Whereas in the previous chapter it was the campaign to abolish flogging in the military, in this one the focus is on the anti-New Poor Law campaign.

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first one explores the use made by articles retrieved in the nineteenth-century British library newspapers archive of a recurrent idiomatic expression that became a visual paradigm of the starvation of the Victorian indigents: to be 'skin and bone'. The second part deals with the causes and treatment of the *decubitus ulcer*, popularly known as bed-sore, in the Victorian

period. The following sections illustrate three case studies of newspaper coverage of stories of workhouse inmates who allegedly died of neglect between 1845 and 1866. The subsequent part will present a possible interpretation of the language used by *The Times* to describe the cases of bed-sores. It will be argued that the articles are laden with euphemisms and allusive expressions linkable to syphilis. The implication is that deaths claimed to have been caused by bed-sores could have been caused by venereal diseases instead. In the final sections there will be an overview of how newspapers other than *The Times* popularized the knowledge of bed-sores.

Skin and bone

The keyword-based research conducted in the digital newspapers archives, Gale databases 19th century British Newspapers and The Times Digital Archive, between 1840-1900, has shown that one of the terms often accompanying the word 'skin' in the retrieved articles was 'bone'. The most striking and frequently used image of Victorian poverty was the child reduced to 'skin and bone'.

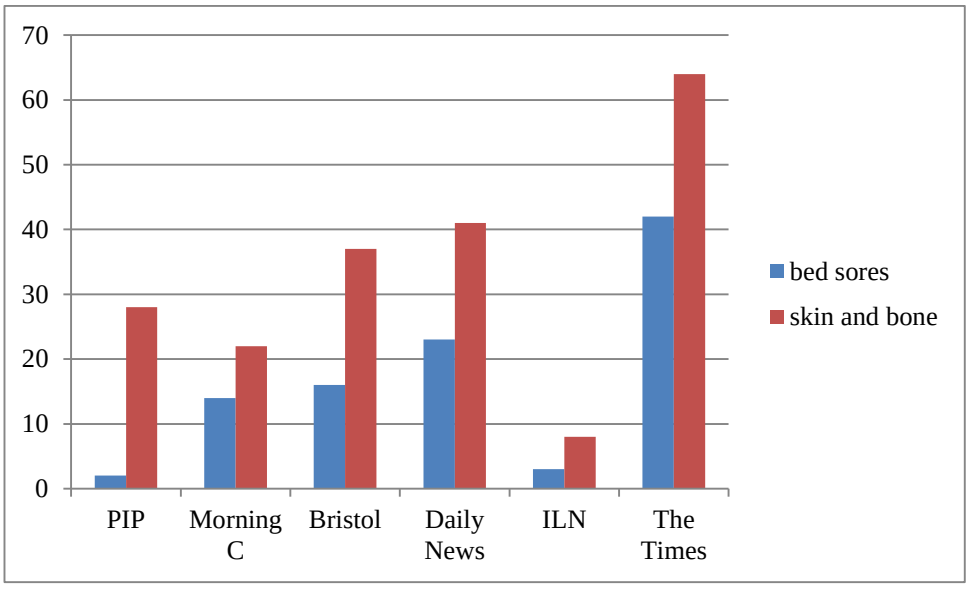

Chart 5.1 Full text search for "bed sores" and "skin and bone" in six newspapers, 1840-1900.

The chart shows how the expression ‘skin and bone’ overran ‘bed sores’. Not surprisingly, the sensational *Penny Illustrated Paper* goes mostly for ‘skin and bone’.

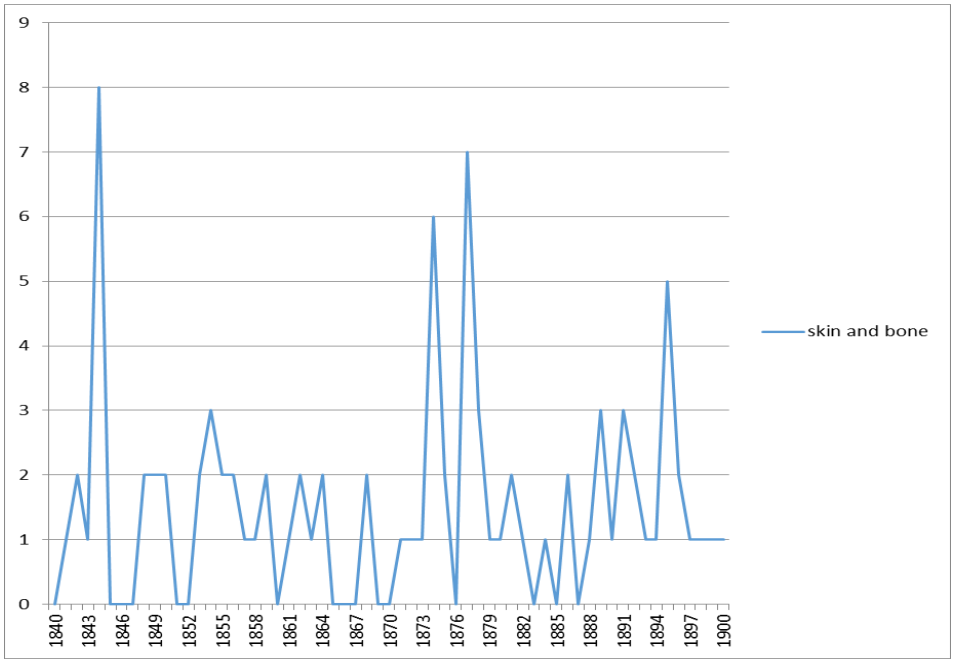

Chart 5.2 Full text search for “skin and bone” in *The Times* 1840-1900

The bone protruding through the skin of paupers was one of the most dynamic pictures employed by the press to convey the reality of poverty to their readers. The sample shown above does only include six newspapers but it is indicative of a trend followed by most of the digitized newspapers (national, provincial, daily, weekly, illustrated) as quick text search can demonstrate This is probably because the bone that becomes visible under the skin signifies the violence of the starvation process and the relentless weakening and passivity of the unfed person. Ballads utilizing the image of the poor as ‘skin and bone’ circulated widely and were reprinted by the newspapers. ‘The Shuttlecock Pauper’ was published by *The Times* in 1847, reprinted from the periodical *Punch*: ‘He was old and thin, so that under the skin/you could count his pauper bones,/ And, like whipcord strands, curled the veins of his hands, as he sat there breaking stones; / And his song went along with the clink of his

hammer - /An old tale of wrong, told in very bad grammar'.[12] It is the story of an illiterate beggar, bearing, as he says, 'vagrant' stamped upon him as a brand. He sings his story telling how all parishes throughout England and Wales refused to help him, condemning him to destitution and isolation. In the nineteenth century, vagrants were often called 'casuals' and were considered worthless: those who entered the workhouses were the most badly treated.[13]

When a ballad appears in print there is an encounter between two different traditions of communication, oral and written; we could also say musical or poetic and prosaic. The foundations of print culture lie in oral culture and folk traditions, which create continuity between oral and written productions.[14] This also reflects the encounter between the mode of expression of an illiterate man and an educated one. That is why the space still devoted to ballads in the Victorian newspapers is particularly valuable. It is one of the few moments where the destitute are able to speak out. Although 'The Shuttlecock Pauper' begins with an observation of the state of the vagrant's body, it conveys that, for him, the most difficult pain to endure was the psychological stress of carrying the stigma of poverty. Being poor would be particularly distressing in a world which sees a lack of self-care as a problem of the individual rather than of the organization of society. The tradition of the ballad as a means to give news hails from the sixteenth century, but the one presented above could well have been produced in the nineteenth century: it was not possible to find similar attestations before 1800. The image 'skin and bone' to indicate poverty and starvation was not a Victorian invention. The following extract from a pamphlet entitled *Stanleyes Remedy* circulating in 1646 demonstrates that back in the seventeenth century the

[12] *The Times*, 11 February 1847, p.7.
[13] Fowler (2007), op. cit., p.182.
[14] Martin Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture* (London: Sage, 2002), p.25.

rhetoric of poverty was pretty similar: ‘The poor may be whipped to death and branded for rogue […] before any private man will set them to work or provide houses for labour’.[15]

In 1856 *The Times* published an article under the title of ‘Shocking Case of Starvation’ about a child who died of neglect. The *post mortem* examination disclosed that the little girl died from starvation only, as her body was found to be clean and without a trace of disease: ‘the body was nothing but skin and bone’.[16] Her sister, then alive, was later described as presenting ‘a most dreadful appearance, the features being sharpened by want, the bones of the chest almost protruding through the skin’.[17] An account of an abandoned child found one early morning in the streets of London is given in a way that confirms that the scenario inside and outside the workhouse was not that different:

> Her bones almost broke through the skin, and the latter was so dirty that the natural colour could not be distinguished. The body was covered with bruises and sores, and the feet were one mass of blood and corruption.[18]

There are numerous stories where, by investigating the causes behind the ‘skin and bone’ appearance of a street child, *The Times* would reveal that the parents, usually a single parent, had abandoned the idea of applying to the parish for relief because they knew that they would have been pushed to go to the workhouse, a possibility which would have closed off any future prospects. On many occasions the representation of the person as 'skin and bone' came together with the image of the wounded person. In 1848 *The Times* published a letter sent to Charles Buller, then Chief Poor Law

[15] Longmate (2003), op. cit., p.13.
[16] *The Times*, 23 August 1856, p.6.
[17] Ibid.
[18] *The Times*, 2 January 1845, p.7.

Commissioner, by a surgeon called Thomas Mackley who denounced the maltreatment of a young boy. The boy's appearance, after medical examination, demonstrated that the feelings of humanity under which the commission claimed to be operating were only words. Briefly, this is his story. John Raistrick was one of the young boys to be sent from the workhouse, where they were living, to work in a pit. However, after a while the boy had to escape from his master due to the constant beating to which he was subjected. The boy was eventually found in a wood nearly dead, and then brought to a public house. Thomas Mackley examined him and here are the words he used to describe his view of the body:

> The whole of his body, from his shoulders down to his feet, bore the marks of old wounds. […] His system appeared cadaverous and emaciated under his clothes, and appeared to consist of but little else than skin and bone.[19]

One of the causes for which children were often reduced to starvation is that they were fed with cornflour, with the misconceived idea that it was nutritious. Although this is a farinaceous substance, it is not sufficiently nutritious. Cases of starvation, symbolised by the 'skin and bone' expression, carried on until the end of the century, appearing at steady intervals in the news reports. This descriptive pattern, of the child as 'skin and bone' presenting the 'most dreadful appearance', recurred often in newspapers' coverage of death by neglect. It is a description which creates a tension between compassion and horror, the latter sometimes prevailing over the former. People in the condition of starvation were also often described as 'skeletons covered with skin' or 'living skeletons'. The ghastly appearance is another recurrent image: it

[19] *The Times*, 16 May 1848, p.8.

seems that the loss of skin would imply, somehow, the loss of humanity and identity at once.

It must be said that the image 'skin and bone' has a very different function from the term 'bed-sores'. The former belongs to the linguistic field of sensational language aimed at conjuring up powerful images. The latter is a popular term with a medical connotation, which might have not provided any image in the mind of the reader without further explanation. Therefore, 'skin and bone' is more concerned with the spectacularization of the body rather than the popularization of dermatology. 'Skin and bone' was more of a shocking image serving the sensationalist purposes of the newspaper than a means to disseminate knowledge about skin through newspapers, serving an epistemological purpose.

Neglect in the workhouse: the *decubitus ulcer*

The workhouse was not intended for the assistance of ill people. Inmates suffering from very different conditions were grouped together indiscriminately with the objective of deterring the able-bodied from looking for financial assistance from public funds: no special care was taken of the sick during the first half of the nineteenth century.[20] As for nursing, proper training started only after the second half of the century, with the foundation of the Florence Nightingale School, opened at St. Thomas Hospital in 1860. Before that, as Nightingale said, nurses were often 'too old, too weak, too drunken, too dirty, too stolid, or too bad to do anything'.[21] Besides, most of the nurses were paupers themselves: for instance, in 1866 there

[20] Brian Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p.3.
[21] Ibid., p.5. This statement appeared in the letter 'Suggestions on the subject of providing, training and organising nurses for the sick poor in workhouse infirmaries' that Florence Nightingale wrote to Sir Thomas Watson, a member of the committee appointed by the President of the Poor Law Board.

were only 111 paid nurses in all the London workhouses.[22] By 1844, 15 per cent of all paupers had been in a workhouse: the total number of occupants was about 180,000. By 1867, 10,300 of the 28,000 inmates were the old and the infirm.[23] Workhouses' infirmaries hosted mostly sick children, people with mental illness, those with skin conditions, epilepsy, tuberculosis and venereal diseases.[24] Syphilis was never publicly acknowledged because of the reticence of the period.[25] In some workhouses there was a separate area, which was called the 'itch' ward, for people with skin diseases.[26] The workhouse was meant for two groups of people: the 'impotent' poor, such as the very old, the very young or disabled people, and the 'able-bodied' poor who were without work or any type of financial income.[27]

One of the greatest afflictions troubling people confined to bed or unable to take care of themselves was the *decubitus ulcer*, a type of wound mostly caused by constant pressure on an area of the body. Deaths connected to *decubitus ulcer* were a common feature of life in the Victorian workhouses. The inquests opened to investigate deaths caused by pressure wounds shed light on the lack of organization and distribution of duties in the workhouse. It was complicated to establish whether those responsible for the deaths were the workhouses' guardians, the doctors or the nurses, or whether the wounds were caused by natural causes. In most cases, the inquest terminated with nothing more than a disciplinary action. No individual was charged because it was normally a concatenation of events, dictated by the workhouse poor regime, which led to deaths. For the press, the *decubitus ulcer*

[22] Hugh James McCurrich, *The Treatment of the Sick Poor in this Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1919), p.38.
[23] Longmate (2003), op. cit., p.119 and 137.
[24] Fowler (2007), op. cit., p.151.
[25] Margaret Anne Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929* (London: Methuen, 1981), p.1.
[26] Fowler (2007), op. cit., p.57.
[27] Longmate (2003), op. cit., p.14.

became a 'mark of neglect', and a symptom of a scandal which symbolised the total state of abandonment in which workhouses' inmates were left. The interest of the newspapers in reporting deaths by bed-sores was driven by the sensation that those stories aroused in readers, but also by a determination to bring public attention to the problem of poverty and the inability of the New Poor Law to address this issue. Before analysing three of the main inquests related to bed-sores of that time, the nature of this type of wound will be explained.

The *decubitus ulcer* is defined as: 'a breakdown of skin, usually over a bony prominence, due to compromised blood flow caused by pressure'.[28] It is also known as the 'bed-sore', as it mostly affects bed-ridden elderly or infirm people where compression from lying in a bed might be the cause.[29] However, potential agents may not only be the bed; in addition to pressure, shearing force, destruction of skin and compromised blood flow might favour the formation of bed-sores. Essentially, lying down or resting on the skin is a predisposing factor.[30] In the late Victorian era, bed-sores were known by medical professionals as *ulcus ex-cubando*. According to a late nineteenth-century dictionary of medicine by Richard Hoblin, the causes of a rather rapid development of this form of ulcer were considered to be: constant pressure on a part of the body, a disease of the spinal cord, low nutrition of the tissues of the patient, and bad nursing.[31] In the late nineteenth century it was believed that good nursing was vital for avoiding the conditions in which bed-sores progress.[32] A rough seam can provoke a bed-sore; the presence of urine, pus, blood or any other discharge in the parts of the body already affected by pressure accelerates the

[28] Caren Campbell and Lawrence Parish, 'The Decubitus Ulcer: Facts and Controversies', *Clinics in Dermatology* 28:5 (2010), p.527.
[29] Harvey Marcovitch (ed.), *Black's Medical Dictionary* (London: A & C Black, 2005), p.738.
[30] Campbell and Parish (2010), op. cit., p.527.
[31] Richard D. Hoblin, *A Dictionary of Terms Used in Medicine* (London: Whittaker & Co., 1892), p.86.
[32] Richard Quain, *A Dictionary of Medicine. Part II*. (London: Longmans, 1890), p.1699.

development of the wounds, therefore maintaining good hygiene conditions is essential. Predisposing causes could also include the use of a feather bed and the presence of a blanket between the mattress and the under sheet, because it becomes a recipient of the patient's perspiration. Bed-sores used to be associated with insane people in the last stages of dementia paralytica where the ulcers occur not only on the parts under pressure but elsewhere. The identification of bed-sores in these cases might be problematic because the sores tended to be confused with local gangrenes. The distinction is important because, in legal terms, it may have very different implications for the parties in question. As a report written by Clayle T. Shaw for Bartholomew's Hospital in 1872 explained, bed-sores start as redness of the skin, usually itchy, followed by a separation of the cuticle, ulceration of the skin and the tissues underneath, and then sloughing. The process is slow but relentless: it can be prevented, but when it begins, it is difficult to stop it. On the other hand, local gangrenes develop quickly from black patches and they are not preventable. While the *decubitus* ulcers might be ascribed to neglect and bad nursing, for local gangrenes the cause could be a preexisting disease and not a 'workhouse management' defect, although neglect would worsen the patient's health.[33]

A deeper comprehension and classification of pressure sores developed only in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1955 Ludwig Guttmann presented the first classification system, and in 1975 J. D. Shea created a staging method recognising four different grades in tissue damage.[34] This means that in the nineteenth century, in spite of the rapid growth of medical knowledge, information about bed-sores might have been limited. Moreover, regarding the evolution of

[33] Clayle T. Shaw, 'On so-called Bed-sores in the Insane', in Dr. Andrew and Mr. Callender (eds.), *Saint Bartholomew's Hospital Reports*, vol. viii (London: Longmans, Green, 1872), p.130-132.
[34] Joyce Black *et al.*, 'National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel's Updated Pressure Ulcer Staging System', *Urologic Nursing* 27:2 (2007), p.144.

wound dressings, the most significant historical event in the improvement of wound care did not occur until the discovery of antiseptics. Louis Pasteur demonstrated that bacteria do not develop spontaneously but are brought in as a substance from the environment. In 1865, English surgeon Joseph Lister, drawing from Pasteur's discovery, started to use carbolic acid to kill the bacteria; mortality rates in the hospitals where he worked fell from 50% to 15% and antiseptic practices began to be adopted systematically.[35]

The Times records the highest occurrence of the expression 'bed-sore', as chart 5.3 displays between 1844 and 1899.

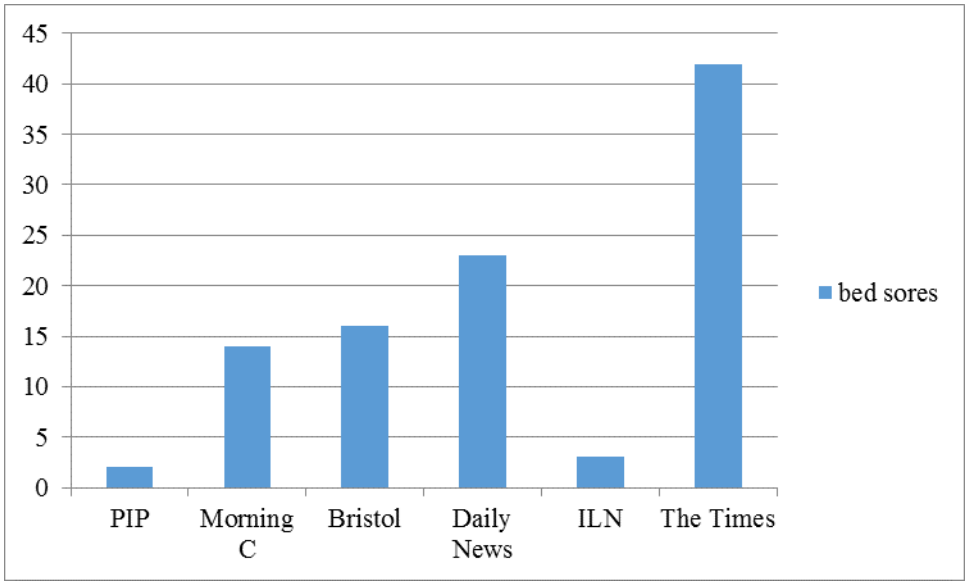

Chart 5.3 Full text search for "bed sores" in six newspapers, including London-based, provincial and illustrated newspapers, 1840s-1890s.

The first use of the word 'bed-sore' in the nineteenth-century digital historical collections of newspapers appears in *The Times*, in 1844. This occurs on the occasion of one of the first *decubitus ulcer*-related inquests. The 17th and 18th century Burney

[35] Liza G. Ovington 'The Evolution of Wound Management: Ancient Origins and Advances of the Past 20 years', *Home Healthcare Nurse: the Journal for Home Care and Hospice Professional* 20:10 (2002), p.652-656.

Collection of Newspapers does not reveal any uses of this word. Similarly, the 19th century British Library Newspapers collection does not return any relevant results showing the employment of the term 'bed-sores' to indicate pressure wounds before 1844.[36] The term's first appearance was in an inquiry conducted by Thomas Wakley. This figure has already been discussed in the previous chapter: he was the famous campaigner and medical journalist, the coroner not only for the 1846 flogging inquiry but for many other cases of suspicious deaths during the first half of the century. The 1844 case concerned George Toone, a prisoner who was kept at the new Model Prison in Pentonville. The *post-mortem* examination revealed the presence of a bed-sore on his back. However, his death was connected to the effects of fever. The verdict did not take into account the bed-sore and the conclusion was that the prisoner died from the effects of fever.[37] Much more sensation was caused by another accident, however, which took place the following year in a lunatic asylum.

The case of William Holding (1845)

In 1845 the newspaper headlines were dominated by the scandal of the Andover workhouse: the press reported that inmates in this Hampshire institution were so starving that they were fighting for rotten marrow from the bones. This was a snapshot from the workhouse that did not encapsulate the whole story but was a symptom of multiple deficiencies involving lack of food supply, neglect, violence, maladministration and

[36] The digital archive wrongly returns a previous attestation dating 1806 in an advertisement published by *The Times*. A man complains that he had been suffering for two years of seven 'bad/bed sores' and then recovered by taking some pills. The digital scanning has misread 'a' for 'e'. The countercheck validating the fact that they are 'bad sores' rather than 'bed-sores' can be demonstrated because advertisements are repeated at regular intervals in the press. Indeed, in the years before and after this attestation, we find many other advertisements of the same pill mentioning clearly 'bad sores' where the 'a' is unmistakably intelligible. Therefore the first use of the expression – considering the scanning defects of the software used to digitize newspapers and the limited, though extensive, amount of items available online – is in 1844.
[37] *The Times*, 2 December 1844, p.7.

complacency.[38] The inquest into the case was prompted once again by Thomas Wakley, who had convinced the government to investigate it. In the same year, Wakley was involved in a case of mistreatment which took place in Peckham. In the spring of that year the authorities of Armstrong's Lunatic Asylum were charged with the neglect and ill-treatment of a 16-year-old inmate. William Holding was found dead in his house one day after he had left the asylum where he had spent five weeks. He had been brought there by his mother after showing signs of violence and insanity. According to the *post-mortem* examination the body was in an emaciated condition, with bones protruding through extensive sores over both hips. The investigations into the circumstances of the death of Holding aroused the attention of the national press which, since the passing of the New Poor Law, was seeking arguments to demonstrate the inappropriateness of these public institutions to deal with poverty and disease. *The Times* devoted full coverage of the stories in two articles run in May of that year. By that time, many sectors of the public had already been reached by the very popular book by Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (1837). This is a direct and strong attack on the New Poor Law and the workhouse system. For example, Dickens captured in his words the image of the drunken nurse so typical of the workhouse nursing system.[39] The case of William Holding offered an opportunity to discuss the relationship between patient and carers: the bed-sores were used as a visible indicator of this relationship. The collective interest of the press in spreading this news was combined with the individual concern of a man, Thomas Wakley, who was keen to bring to public attention the faults and negligence of the management system of Victorian workhouses and asylums. As with the flogging case, Wakley knew well that there was an appetite in the

[38] Fowler (2007), op. cit., p.8.
[39] Oliver Twist's birth was attended in a workhouse by a 'pauper old woman, [the nurse] who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer, and a parish surgeon'. In Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), p.3.

press to linger on the morbid details emerging from the public *post-mortem* examinations, but he tried to make the press go beyond those details. For him the wounds on a deceased body were much more than impressionistic anatomical details. They were first legal evidence and then sources for a story: usually a story of abuse or negligence. They were the proof of what had happened on the bodies of those who could no longer explain. Wakley might well have believed that the disgust arising from the view or the portrayal of putrefying bodies should have been disregarded in order to give more space to emotions of sympathy, leading to reflection.

The story of Holding presents a characteristic which is typical of cases of bed-sores: a move from home to one institution and then to another one. The move creates the following problem: where did the bed-sores start? According to Sarah Holding, the mother of the deceased, whose account was published by *The Time*s on 15 May 1845, the day after the investigation began, her son was first admitted with no sores to the workhouse of St. Mary in Newington. After one week he was transferred to the asylum; regarding his mental health it is just said that he acted in an insane and aggressive way shortly before being admitted to the workhouse. She did not complain about the way he was treated there but she thought that he might have been tied down to the bed very tightly. She did think that in the lunatic asylum her son was ill-treated and neglected, therefore she chose to remove him. This version of the facts, that before entering the workhouse he had no wounds, is corroborated by the description given by Alexander Patrick Stuart, a student of medicine who visited Holding before he left to go back home. Stuart, interrogated by the coroner, said that he visited Holding again three days after he was removed from the lunatic asylum and found himself in front of a completely different scenario. Here are his words:

'He was in a state of the most extreme emaciation, had no sense, was pulseless, and his skin was quite cold. There were wounds covering the whole of both hips and haunch bones, which presented them quite bare, and there was a large sloughing sore at the bottom of the spine'.[40] When the coroner asked what could have been the cause of those sores, the student replied with no hesitation that they were produced by the compression arising from persistent lying on those parts of the body, and that they were called 'bed-sores'. In the first part of *The Times'* report, there is a detailed description of the physical condition of Holding translated into popular terms. Once the reader has got the picture, arguably by drawing his attention to the body of the deceased, an instructional section on the prevention of bed-sores begins. The medical student explained that bed-sores must be prevented by keeping the patient clean and dry, changing the blankets frequently, and changing his position to prevent continual pressure on one part of the body.

Stuart, the medical student, had no doubt that Holding died because of exhaustion caused by the discharge from the bed-sores. Another instructive moment is when the coroner breaks down the components of the story to address the problem. Wakley observes that in this case two classes of disease have been recognised: one external, visibly apparent, and one internal, found only after dissecting the body. The problem is that if Holding died naturally as a consequence of the disease of his brain then the inquiry ends. If instead the death was caused by his wounds, then the law must ascertain whether there is any other human culpability: neglect or cruel treatment or both. When Wakley makes these pauses of reflection, it is as if he is aware that he is being listened to by the newspapers' readers; certainly this is

[40] *The Times*, 15 May 1845, p.7.

something that any coroner knew when conducting inquiries, but Wakley seems to be particularly willing to direct the evolution of the story. His analytical attitude reveals his medical background: he dissects the witness's account almost as if it were the body under examination. At that time, reports of public inquests in newspapers read like an interminable sequence of lines between coroner and witnesses with very little attempt to construct a story or create narrative connections between the different stages of the inquiry. To some extent, Wakley managed to break this model and anticipate a much more narrative way to tell a story, which was to dominate journalistic style in later years.

Continuing the inquest, the surgeon of Peckham House said that when Holding entered the institution he already had bed-sores, which he then promptly made sure were dressed. According to George Page, the keeper of Peckham House, the patient was provided with a water-bed and was washed twice a day.[41] James Hill, surgeon of the Peckham asylum, declared that he checked the state of Holding half an hour after he was admitted and noted the sores on his hips; despite the greatest attention devoted to him there was no way to cure the bed-sores. He said that when Holding left the asylum the wounds were in the same state as when he arrived. So he could not pose a remedy to them, but neither did they get worse. Then Page somehow contradicts the surgeon by saying that when Holding left the asylum the sores were not the same as when he came in; when he was discharged, the size of the sores was as small as a five shilling piece,[42] half the measure they were before his admission to the asylum. The medical officers of Newington union house strongly

[41] The water-bed was a watertight mattress filled with water. It is an invention of the nineteenth century aimed at relieving invalids from bed-sores as it was thought to minimize the pressure of the mattress.
[42] It was common in these inquests to compare the size of wounds to coins. A further example is in Chapter six, see p.218.

disagreed as they believed that when Holding left the workhouse he had no bed-sores and the skin was present on his hips and his back. Today we know that a mere blush would be a warning, as the report produced by Shaw in 1872 for St. Bartholomew's Hospital was later to show: bed-sores usually start with a reddening of the skin.[43] The coroner distinguished three different stories. According to Holding's mother, the man still had no sores; the workhouse said that Holding had just a mere blush of the skin; and the asylum's account states that he continued to have a condition he had already developed elsewhere, wounds on the hips that were digging into the skin. Holding's sister described the wounds as looking as if an instrument had been drawn across them: 'The wounds were so frightful that I could not tell what appearance that part of his body presented'.[44] Despite different accounts, the sores on the body of the deceased are there to testify that they were more than five inches long at the time of his decease, and that if precautions had been taken the sores might have been prevented. Before hearing the jury's verdict, Wakley, as usual, addressed some remarks to the audience, which once again reveals his awareness of the importance of these spaces of reflection to frame the story and highlight its universal importance for the sake of 'the greatest good', as he said. Wakley wants this case to be remembered, to constitute not just an everyday news report but a sort of parable. Here is how Wakley addresses the public during the inquiry: 'Ay, there is the difficulty we are in. Either of the two diseases was sufficient to account for death, but the question is, which really killed the patient?' In contrast to the flogging case, it does not seem totally clear whether Wakley knew the answer to this question. He knew, as did probably everybody else, that Holding was neglected but the connection

[43] See p.168.
[44] *The Times*, 15 May 1845, p.7.

between neglect, bed-sores and death was ambivalent (and probably still is today). This is mainly because of the difficulties in establishing the nature of those sores and excluding with complete certainty that they were not local gangrenes produced by other diseases such as syphilis. This dilemma will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. For now it is sufficient to know that no definitive answer was found to Wakley's question - but not because of the problem of distinguishing venereal sores from bed-sores. The medical expertise heard during the inquest agreed in recognising the bed-sores as the cause of death. The dilemma that prevented anyone from being charged was the problem of establishing which institution, the workhouse or the asylum, was to be blamed for the appearance of bed-sores on the body of William Holding. The nature of the sores and the difficulty in recognizing their nature remained in the undertones of the discussion. *The Times* described the intention thus:

> […] painful as these inquiries invariably were, he [Wakley] believed they were calculated to work out the greatest good in enforcing the principles of humanity into the management of private lunatic asylums, as was afforded to prisoners in the common gaols-namely, that in every case of death an inquest should be held.[45]

Wakley then concluded by saying that 'it was rather by the publicity given to the proceedings than by harsh verdicts that good resulted to society in such cases as the present'. The jury came to the conclusion that William Holding died from exhaustion caused by discharge from large wounds from his hips; although there was inflammation in his skin when he arrived at Peckham House, the wounds developed in depth afterwards. The jury felt that it did not have enough evidence to establish the cause of the wounds but it reached the conclusion that the patient was neglected

[45] *The Times*, 20 May 1845, p.8.

while he was in the asylum. Although *The Times*, amongst all the papers, devoted the most extensive coverage to the story, it did not stress a detail which emerged clearly in the report of the *Morning Chronicle*. This was the most famous morning daily newspaper of the first half of the nineteenth century; bought by stockbrokers and bankers, it was owned by the Whig politician and journalist John Easthope; it aimed at creating opposition to *The Times*. The detail concerns the coroner's inquiry into the infirmary's medical book. During the inquest Wakley observed that the medical books produced by the asylum only showed general notes about the patient suffering from dementia with paralysis, but there was no mention of any wound, nor a description of the therapy undertaken by the patient.[46] Commenting on the lack of written records, Wakley remarked that criminals were better off than lunatics because in each gaol there was a medical book.[47] Wakley was the coroner who led the inquiry into the aforementioned case of the prisoner held at Pentonville, the first occasion where we saw the usage of the expression 'bed-sore'. He said that each medical officer has a case-book including nutritional and medical recommendations and that a new bill was about to be introduced to remedy the lack of written records in public institutions such as workhouses and lunatic asylums. In this last remark, Wakley also shows his profile as a Member of Parliament interested in generating changes aimed at improving the life of paupers. The reference to the written record can be compared to the paper duty's to publish written reports, to print word, in this case under the directions of a skilful communicator such as Thomas Wakley.

[46] 'Dementia with paralysis' or 'general paralysis of the insane' were the terms usually used for tertiary syphilis, the last stage of that disease before death.
[47] *Morning Chronicle*, 15 May 1845.

The imprint of the neglect of the asylum left on Holding's body bears testimony to the lack of care of poor people in the Victorian period. The patient could no longer speak but his wounds told his story; however, this was insufficient to discern how the wounds were caused. The discrepancy between the different accounts and the occurrence of the disease of the brain complicates things further. In particular, for insane patients the medical book is a vital record to the clinical history of the patient. The newspaper report attempts to replace this by giving words to the supposed victim of social injustice.

Timothy Daly and Richard Gibson (1865)

Twenty years later this story repeated itself. Before 1850 there was no official regulation of the treatment of inmates with mental disabilities; the period between the 1860s and 1870s recorded a significant increase in the number of lunatics in asylums.[48] In 1862 the Lunacy Act, as a consequence of overcrowding in the asylums, established that under certain circumstances chronic lunatics could be moved from asylums into workhouse lunatic wards.[49] Twenty years after the Holding inquest, neglect in the workhouses was still a crucial topic for the press. In 1857 the medical officer of health of St. Giles in the Fields and St. George's Bloomsbury declared that the infirmaries were overloaded with people suffering from bronchitis, paralysis or consumption: one out of five died.[50] This parish was one of the poorest

[48] Felix Driver, *Power and Pauperism. The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.107.
[49] Ibid., p.109.
[50] Geoffrey Rivett, *The Development of the London Hospital System 1832-1982* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.64.

areas of the city – site of the notorious rookeries and subject to campaigns for slum clearance and drives against crime.

Between 1862 and 1865 high rates of unemployment led many people to enter the workhouses, meaning that they were hosting more people than they could possibly accommodate.[51] One of these was an Irish ex-railway worker called Timothy Daly, who died when he was 27 years old, shortly after leaving the Holborn Union House, London. The story of Daly was first made public through the columns of *The Times*: James L. Shuter, a doctor and member of the Common Council, sent a letter to the paper denouncing the ill-treatment of Daly. The letter by Shuter, sent while Daly was still alive, did not save his life but had a great impact on the public in calling attention to the lack of proper nursing and medical care in workhouses' infirmaries. The letter was followed by a sharp *Times* editorial, of which the following is an extract:

> The appearance of bed-sores is certainly not conclusive proof of neglect, for, in spite of Mr. Lowne's opinion, we know that this distressing symptom often baffles medical skill where the patient is surrounded with all that money can procure. But it is impossible to believe, after reading Mr. Lowne's evidence, that much was done either to prevent or to relieve them.[52]

An official investigation opened on 7 January 1865. The inquiry was opened by Harry Burrad Farnall by the order of the Poor Law Board (which did not exist at the time of the inquest into Holding's death). It had been created in 1847 after the Andover workhouse scandal. One of the first evident differences from the previous inquest on bed-sores was the coroner. Thomas Wakley, who died in 1862, had been a

[51] Joseph Rogers, *Reminiscences of a Workhouse Medical Officer* (London: Fisher, 1889), p.41.
[52] *The Times*, 29 December 1864, p.6. Benjamin Thompson Lowne is the medical officer who attended Daly in the Union-court and informed Shuter of the bed-sores.

person external to the Poor Law system while Harry Farnall was a Poor Law Inspector.

The Irish man had entered the union after an attack of rheumatic fever. Afterwards, his condition deteriorated and he developed three large sores. In contrast to Holding's case, in this one a few statements made by the patient were reported. Daly himself told Dr. Shuter that the three bed-sores had been forming for six weeks and during that time no medical officers examined them. Daly himself alleges that the cause of bed-sores was the bed where he was lying. He is said to have complained often that the bedstead was too short.[53] One of the witnesses called just before the end of the inquest would state that he had never seen the patient's feet sticking out of the bed because actually he used to sleep with his knees bent.[54] The blankets were never changed and were saturated with perspiration – the result of rheumatic fever. One of the very first issues to be addressed during the beginning of the inquiry is the type of bedding, which suggests that the idea that Daly died from bed-sores was already widespread and convincing. One of the doctors who assisted Daly, John Norton, would then confirm the inadequacy of the bed, admitting that they did not use a waterbed or air-cushions for the patient because they believed these would have constituted additional comforts rather than a preventative measure.[55]

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[53] The inadequate size of Daly's bed was to become a leitmotif. Years later the *Lancet*, commemorating the death of James G. Wakley, editor of the *Lancet* after his father's death, recalled how the younger Wakley had committed himself to shed light on the defects of society such as those of 'a workhouse bed too short for projecting the limbs of Timothy Daly' ('James G. Wakley', in the *Lancet*, 128:3288, 4 September 1886). Years later, the *Lancet* recalled Daly's case as the symbol of the scandal of the lack of equipment in workhouses: again the piece recalled that Daly's feet 'projected several inches beyond the edge of his bed': see the *Lancet* 140:3593, (9 July 1892), p.96.

[54] *The Times*, 16 January 1865, p.6.

[55] *The Times*, 11 January 1865, p.11.

The beds in which the poor lay within the workhouses held a sort of imaginative power in popular culture, probably because they resemble a prelude to death, the coffin, rather than an image of rest. Prior to these episodes this had already been a standard under which to attack the New Poor Law. A broadside ballad which circulated in 1834, printed in Cheltenham declaimed: 'The bedsteads there I do declare are made of iron strong; The beds are filled with feathers fine, they're nearly two yards long'.[56] So this gives an idea of the type of accommodation that would be likely to be found in a union's infirmary. Usually the nurses were in charge of changing the blankets, but as previously noted the nursing system was not very reliable. Those in Holborn were pauper nurses: the *British Medical Journal* published an article on this topic. It stated that the employment of pauper nurses would actually prolong illness. Pauper nurses, said the report, were not trained and were unable to take care even of themselves, often drunken and misbehaving at the expense of the patients.[57] It was on this occasion that Florence Nightingale wrote to the president of the Poor Law, Charles Pelham Villiers, to inquire about the conditions of nurses in the workhouses. Villiers replied that there were not enough trained nurses.[58] The fact is that if the nurses did not change the blankets it could be credible that nobody there knew of the existence of Daly's bed-sores because nobody had seen them. However, this would only be a valid consideration if the patient had not talked. From the newspaper's reports we learn that Daly did talk and complained about his bed-sores: he was able to assess his condition and articulate it.

[56] Trevor May, *An Economic and Social History of Britain 1760-1970* (London: Longman, 1995), p.139. 'Feathers fine' could mean 'horse hair'.
[57] 'Pauper Nurses', *BMJ* 2:1906 (1897), p.104.
[58] Rivett (1986), op. cit., p.67.

This leads to another point which was also present in the Holding inquest, which is the maintenance of the patient's medical written records. Regarding the diet of Daly, John Norton said that a dietary book existed, which he was in charge of keeping, but he did not do so. As a written record, it would have been useful from a legal point of view, because it would have made it possible to ascertain what Daly's diet was while he was suffering from bed-sores. Farnall also, in a further session, pointed out that the importance of having written records is crucial both to the poor and the ratepayers as they also contain economic information.[59] On 11 January 1865, more details emerged. Dr Lewis (his first name is not given) admits noticing wounds on Daly's body but he did not pay too much attention because they were superficial.[60] When B. T. Lowne (who had triggered the public inquest by writing to Shuter about the condition of Daly) was heard he explained why he had sent that letter. He wanted Daly to be immediately transferred into a hospital; although he was certain that because of the gravity of the wounds he would have died anyway or remained crippled for life. This was because, according to him, the wounds had already destroyed the bones, he says [as resumed by the article]:

> The great essentials which might have prolonged the life the life of Daly were cleanliness, fresh atmosphere, careful attention to his wounds, the administration of bark, and every species of nutriment that he could digest.[61]

Having said that, Lowne adds that he believed Daly perspired so much not because of the rheumatic fever but because the windows were kept closed all the time with a fire in the room. The same day another medical expert was heard: Dr. Andrews, a

[59] *The Times*, 11 January 1865, p.10.
[60] Ibid.
[61] *The Times*, 13 January 1865, p.10.

member of the Royal College of Physicians who saw Daly in St. Bartholomew's hospital shortly before he died.[62] When interrogated he said that he attended over 2,000 cases a year, and in his 20 years of experience in the Farringdon Dispensary none of his patients ever developed bed-sores; he believed that under his care Daly would have still been alive. The lack of bed-sores in an infirmary would have then been used as a concrete indicator of the quality of a hospital. Dr Andrews strongly believed that Daly died from bed-sores. He explained that the wide wound on his right hip may have affected the circulation in his extremities and consequently the health of the limb. He also adds that rheumatic fever might have affected the recovery but not prevented it. Eventually Andrews was asked 'Can you form an opinion as to whether this man lost his life through bad nursing and improper treatment while he was suffering from rheumatic fever?,' The answer was: 'I believe the man's death was caused by bed-sores.'

In the February of that year, after over one month of sessions, a verdict was reached. Meanwhile, the workhouse was checked and the report stated that bedstead, bed clothes and bathroom conditions were good.[63] Inspector Farnall concluded that the evidence taken at the inquiry did not offer enough grounds to charge the medical officer of the Holborn Union Workhouse, Dr. John Norton, with neglecting Timothy Daly. However, Farnall pointed out that Norton, in failing to update the medical book, deprived the jury of an important element of judgement, particularly with regard to the diet: therefore Farnall considered Norton's conduct in this matter 'careless' and worthy of censure. Nonetheless, the inquiry ended with no charges for the workhouse. However, two alterations were required by the inspector in the workhouse management system: that two paid nurses

[62] Andrews' forename is unknown.
[63] *The Times*, 4 February 1865, p.5.

should be employed and that the medical officers' salary be increased. *The Times*' reply to Farnall's way of conducting the inquiry did not take long to come. On 6 February an editorial argued that Farnall's verdict might have been conditioned by the fact that he was an advocate of the parties implicated in the inquest: he was the Metropolitan Inspector of the Poor Law Board.[64] This is diametrically opposite to the flogging case where Thomas Wakley and Erasmus Wilson were accused by medical journal the *Medical Times* of a lack of impartiality in judging the cause of death of Private John White.

The inquest might have been established by the Poor Law Commission not because, as Farnall was suggesting, the pain of the sick poor must be acknowledged, but only in order to restore the image of the Poor Law to the public, stained as it was by the letters published in *The Times*. The two verdicts on the death of Daly, the second one following an official enquiry, sound different enough: the previous one was reached almost immediately after Daly's *post-mortem* examination stated that 'deceased died from exhaustion from bed-sores […]', whereas the Poor Law outcome did not mention the bed-sores at all, merely stating that there was not enough evidence to charge Norton, who was nevertheless 'careless'. 'Yet the man died with every indication of having been underfed, badly nursed, and neglected'.[65] If we compare Wakley's attitude with Farnall's we can see an immediate difference: in Wakley's words there was not a hint of compassion. Wakley was straightforward, his beliefs about the story emerged through the direction that he imparted to the inquest rather than the content of his discourse. Farnall, by contrast, is more rhetorical. For instance, here is how *The Times* reports the exchange of conversation

[64] *The Times*, 6 February 1865, p.9.
[65] Ibid.

between one of the witnesses, a Holborn workhouse surgeon named T. A. Lathbury, and Farnall:

> [The witness] told the landlady that what Daly ought to have as nourishment was beef, tea, gruel, and milk. He imagined that he had the means of procuring that nourishment. Mr. Farnall - "Imagined" he had! But we must not be imagining when the lives of poor people are involved.[66]

Farnall seems to be suggesting an empathy which was not a characteristic of the New Poor Law System. The empathy could have been provided by mentioning the word 'bed-sore' again in the final verdict. Instead, it was eradicated, as if the bed-sores had only existed in the patient's imagination. It could be argued that if Wakley had been in charge of this inquest, the outcome might have been slightly worse for the medical officers working at the Holborn Union - and definitely for the public image of the Poor Law Board.

Simultaneously to Daly's story, the case of another workhouse resident called Richard Gibson who had allegedly died because of bed-sores, received attention from the newspapers. The story was protracted, continuing from June 1864 to February 1865. The official verdict was that he died from a disease of the brain, possibly accelerated by neglect at St. Giles' Workhouse in Camberwell. In this case, similarly to the story of William Holding, it was necessary to establish which one of the two problems, disease of the brain or bed-sores, provoked the death. In contrast to Daly's story, much more stress was put on the insufficient diet of the inmate: more research was being carried out on the links between nutrition and formation of pressure wounds. As with the story of Daly, *The Times'* coverage was triggered by a

[66] *The Times*, 9 January 1865, p.10.

letter, this one sent by an inmate called Felix Magee who occupied the same ward as Gibson. But the letter was not sent directly to the editor of *The Times* but to Sir Thomas Henry, chief magistrate at Bow Street. The paper published the content of the letter which said:

> I never saw a human being in so dreadful a condition; he was delirious; he had a large wound on his back; his brown skin was marked with red spots like marks from itch or vermin; his person was in a filthy condition.[67]

As in the previous stories, the problem of a lack of written records emerged. On May 1865, almost one year after the death of Gibson, *The Times* published a recapitulation editorial under the title of 'The sad story of poor Richard Gibson'. The editorial criticizes the fact that nobody was informed of the condition of Gibson, and there were no written reports:

> It is said that nobody told the master or the doctor or the nurse what at the last minute was told to Sir Thomas Henry, though nobody ventures to assert that there was nothing to tell. If this is the way of the "wards" in a metropolitan workhouse, it is high time that their inmates should be encouraged to speak out for themselves.[68]

Between the end of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century the erosion of the patient's narrative was created by an increasing focus on signs of diseases: there was less interest in the story told by the patient and greater stress on symptoms.[69] The lack of written documentation also meant that deaths happening in workhouses and hospitals were not as often recorded as those at home. This means that any attempt to shed light on the history of patients' management in workhouses was

[67] *The Times*, 17 May 1865, p.13.
[68] *The Times*, 18 May 1865, p.11.
[69] Mary E. Fissell, 'The Disappearance of the Patient's Narrative and the Invention of Hospital Medicine', in Roger French and Andrew Wear, *British Medicine in an Age of Reform* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.93.

characterised by a 'loss of patients' narrative'.[70] In times when ballads had lost their primacy in recounting a story from the perspective of people who could not write and read, to some extent the British press made up for the lack of written records. It did so by telling the stories of the inmates who died, with the proof of neglect inscribed on their skin. There is a thread between the bed-sores as a mark of neglect, the lack of written medical records, the lack of 'patient narrative', the function of the press and the letters of the readers. The concatenation of these signs, whether on skin or on paper, partially replaced the lack of first-hand accounts and mediated the medical officers' accounts. The skin plays as a herald, a story-teller which, though powerful, needs a medium. The newspaper acts as a medium because it translates medical knowledge into popular knowledge, putting the medical profession in contact with the public. The discourse surrounding the skin makes it possible to move from the particular, such as a case of bed-sores in a poor person, to the general, to everybody's skin.

The Gibson inquiry led to the resignation of the medical officer and the paid nurse. Furthermore, a campaign was launched by the *Lancet* and the *BMJ* calling for higher pay for medical officers and medical assistants. In 1865 the *Lancet* established a commission to investigate the metropolitan workhouses. The same year Nightingale presented a draft of her 'ABC of Workhouse Reform' suggesting separation of the sick from the non-sick poor.[71] Afterwards, the press was accused of sensationalising the cases of neglect emerging in the workhouses. In 1867, during a

[70] Graham Mooney 'Diagnostic Spaces: Workhouses, Hospital and Home in Mid-Victorian London', *Social Science History* 33:3 (2009), p.369.
[71] Rivett (1986), op. cit., p.68.

House of Commons debate about the introduction of the Metropolitan Poor Act,[72] MP Gathorne Hardy blamed the press for having exaggerated the gravity of the problems surrounding the treatment of the poor in London. He said that considering that there were 35 workhouses hosting around 25,000-30,000 persons, four cases of death by neglect (Timothy Daly, Richard Gibson) were not such a significant number. He compared the action of the press to a kaleidoscope, where the comments of the newspapers acted as mirrors which reflected an image disproportionate to the reality.[73] The use of the word 'kaleidoscope' requires some analysis because it could cast light on the self-perception of the press and possible incongruities with how we perceive it today. The word 'kaleidoscope' at that time had a very recent history. The term had been coined only in 1817 to signify an optical instrument, cylinder-shaped, invented by Scottish physicist David Brewster. According to the MP, the press worked on the same principles as the kaleidoscope. The comparison between the newspaper and the kaleidoscope could be interpreted as follows: the kaleidoscope has four mirrors (representing the four cases of neglect discussed in Parliament), which operate on the principle of multiple reflections, constantly changing shapes and patterns around a motif or reflection: in this case, bed-sores. Brewster, in *Letters on Natural Magic*, mentioned optical instruments as evidence validating his argument that there is a tortuous relationship between fact and judgement.[74] This seems true when it comes to the news coverage of skin. Talking about the skin allows the paper to express itself in its kaleidoscopic nature and reflect the multifaceted nature of the topic.

[72] This act introduced a series of changes mainly aimed at re-distributing the Poor Law medical functions and separating them from its poor relief functions.

[73] *The Times*, 9 February 1867, p.4.

[74] Iwan Rhys Morus, 'Illuminating Illusions, or, the Victorian Art of Seeing Things', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10:1 (2012), p.41.

Linguistic mystification of venereal sores in *The Times*

As we have seen through the analysis of three case studies, bed-sores were of great interest for newspapers. They attracted audiences and shaped the campaign against the Poor Law Act. The cases of deaths by bed-sores had been presented as examples of workhouse or lunatic asylums' lack of care. However, in this section another possible reading of these public inquests, as covered by *The Times*, will be proposed. This concerns the type of sores usually found on the bodies of the inmates. It could be speculated, based on the language used by the press, that those people's main affliction was not bed-sores. The hypothesis is that either venereal sores could have been mistaken for bed-sores or, although it was known that those deaths were caused by a venereal condition, the poor law commissioners and the press kept on saying they were bed-sores due to the reluctance, typical of the period, to address sexually-related diseases.

As said previously, bed-sores and local gangrenes require a different treatment. The former can be prevented by avoiding pressure on those parts. The latter cannot be avoided if they are connected to a constitutional problem. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the classical primary ulcer of syphilis had been identified by John Hunter, from whom comes the name: Hunterian chancre.[75] In the first half of the century the clinical picture of primary, secondary and tertiary syphilis had been established, gonorrhoea was distinguished from syphilis and the clinical picture of the chancroid had been made.[76] Therefore physicians knew that certain

[75] John Thorne Crissey and Lawrence Parish, *The Dermatology and Syphilology of the Nineteenth-Century* (New York: Praeger, 1981), p.83.
[76] Ibid., p.94.

sores could be ascribed to a venereal ailment. This is why the medical officers within the workhouses could have been well aware of the type of problem they were facing. John Bristowe devoted a section of his *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Medicine* to bed-sores emanating from nervous diseases. Bristowe defined bed-sores connected withparalysis as 'patches of gangrene'. What is significant is that he added another category of bed-sores occurring in paralysis cases. The main difference between these and bed-sores generated uniquely from pressure is that they develop quickly. Therefore, while bed-sores would develop gradually, gangrenes would be rapid in their evolution. This could explain why the medical officers heard during the trials so often recalled not having seen the sores and then suddenly having discovered them when it was too late. This category of sores would usually appear in the sacral region and would also involve the hips.[77] Regarding the condition named 'General Paralysis of the Insane' it must be said that when it was discovered in the early 1840s there was confusion about its causes. The possibility of syphilis had been suggested in 1857 but generally the condition, considered incurable, was believed to be caused by a series of factors such as excess of alcohol, tobacco and sex.[78] The reason why cases of venereal sores were not made public is because, as John Crissey and Lawrence Parish explained, cases of syphilis pushed people to confront a reality involving human relationships that at that time it was considered better to conceal:

> In dealing with the disease the physician was caught up continuously in situations supercharged with emotion-questions of maternal or paternal responsibility, marriages ruined or delayed, bitter recriminations, litigation, and, worst of all, an unending series of spontaneous

[77] John Syer Bristowe, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Medicine* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1876), p.938.
[78] Gayle Davis, 'The Most Deadly Disease of the Asylumdom: General Paralysis of the Insane and Scottish psychiatry, c. 1840-1940', in *J R Coll Physicians Edinb* 42:3 (2012), p.266-73.

> abortions, stillbirths, moribund infants, and severely damaged children.[79]

Therefore syphilis was often referred to via some sort of allusion or euphemism. For example, dermatologist Erasmus Wilson, in his *Healthy Skin,* describes a vaginal infection known as leucorrhea by using vague expressions such as 'suspicious connection' or 'white'.[80] An example of how the Victorian print world euphemistically alluded to syphilis is a letter that appeared in *The Times* in 1863 entitled 'Our moral plague spot'. It reads as if the writer is making hints to the reader to enable him to guess what is being talked about without ever mentioning it by name, as if in a riddle:

> It has a philosophy of its own, dark and mysterious […] It has a literature dating from the earliest period […] A malady, one of the most formidable and disastrous yet inflicted on humanity, which has destroyed the peace of families, and transmitted feebleness and corruption through many a generation; thus exemplifying the truth of the assertion, "The evil that men do lives after them".[81]

Concern about venereal diseases and their effect on the armed forces was gathering pace at this time. In the following year the first of the Contagious Diseases Acts was passed, which allowed for the forcible detention and treatment of women suspected to be prostitutes. The campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts (three Acts were eventually passed) was one of the first major feminist campaigns.

The letter does not say exactly which editorial it is referring to: there are a few options. One possibility is that the letter is a response to an article titled 'Vice

[79] Crissey and Parish (1981), op. cit., p.92.
[80] Ibid., p.85.
[81] *The Times*, 2 September 1863, p.9.

and Disease' reprinted from the *Lancet* a few days earlier. Here the disease is called by its name - 'syphilis' - and it is described as a national concern since it is mostly affecting people in the army and in the navy. It is also called 'evil' and a 'disabling plague'.[82] One other option is that the letter is the follow-up to an editorial printed around two weeks before, which looks even more clumsy than the preceding example: 'We are content to recognize certain things as things that have been and will be […] If men choose to do evil, they must take the consequences'.[83] The editorial, which expresses concern for soldiers and sailors sent in great numbers to hospitals for the 'evil' - venereal diseases – says that the topic is embarrassing. The word 'syphilis' in newspapers mainly appears in advertisements and classifieds; although it also appeared in the article mentioned above, that was reprinted from a medical journal. The exploration of the usage of the word 'syphilis' in the press is difficult precisely because of this indirect and encrypted language. It looks like it is fully acknowledged that there is a necessity to speak about it but the newspaper cannot find a proper linguistic way to frame a topic so dense with moral connotations.

Confusion between pressure sores and wounds caused by tertiary syphilis is still common today. Uwe Wollina referred to a case of an elderly patient reporting a presacral pressure ulcer-like wound then diagnosed as gummatous lesions associated with syphilitic infection.[84] By analysing the language adopted by *The Times* in giving the account of the three cases illustrated before, it is likely that William Holding, Timothy Daly and Richard Gibson were affected by syphilis. Therefore the lack of

[82] *The Times*, 28 August 1863, p.10.
[83] *The Times*, 19 August 1863, p.8.
[84] Uwe Wollina *et al*., 'Pressure Ulcer-Like Presacral Gummata in Patient with Tertiary Syphilis', in *International Wound Journal* 2:1 (2005), p.74-76.

care within the infirmaries might not have been the critical factor in their deaths although it might have accelerated the course of the disease. The two main elements are that in all these cases the patients suffered from a brain disease and they were all rather young. Holding was 16, Daly 28 and Gibson 40, so they did not fall into the category that usually filled the infirmaries: elderly and disabled people. The three all seemed to be of good constitution but they showed signs of insanity.

In the case of William Holding, the first element is how the sores appeared on the body. It is controversial whether they started as redness or not; one of the witnesses recalled seeing 'simply a slight pussy discharge' on the hips.[85] This statement is contradicted by Edward Coppin, a pauper who slept in the next bed to Holding, who indeed remembers a slight blush on the hips and back, and the presence of redness was confirmed by other witnesses. The second element is that Sara Holding, the mother, recalled that when the patient was moved from the workhouse where he stayed for about one week, to the asylum where he stayed for five weeks, he had no sores. Therefore, the sores developed quickly, which is not a typical characteristic of bed-sores: their evolution is usually gradual, as Clayle Shaw explained at the time. The medical student, Patrick Stuart, in fact stated that the sores developed in an unusually rapid way. The third element concerns the sleeping habits of the patient. His mother said he used to sleep lying on his side. Therefore Stuart could not explain the bed-sore on Holding's back, if he did not sleep upon it.

The depositions of the witnesses are fraught with contradictions: the very first appearance of the sores, the disease of the brain which is mentioned but not explained in detail, the type of bed where Holding was put (as apparently he was

[85] *The Times*, 20 May 1845, p.8.

moved from a straw bed to a water bed). The newspapers too contradict one another: *The Times* on the 15 May report states that there was dementia without paralysis whereas the *Morning Chronicle* reported that the medical books indicated that the patient suffered from dementia with paralysis, a condition typical of syphilitic sufferers.[86] In the case of Timothy Daly, if we look at its language *The Times* reported that according to the surgeon of the Holborn Union Workhouse, Dr. John Norton, he died from exhaustion from rheumatic fever while in a typhoid state and that 'there was a complication of bad diseases'.[87] 'Bad diseases' is a recurrent expression in the Victorian period for syphilis. Syphilis was also called 'bad blood'. Another possible euphemism is 'rheumatic fever', a description that *The Times* put in quotation marks. Daly was said to have been suffering from rheumatism, but this might be yet another way to indicate syphilis. As we have seen one of the most recurrent topics in Daly's case was the inadequate size of the bed which, according to the medical officers, would account for the crippled state of Daly, whose knees were strongly contracted. However, contracted limbs are also a feature of patients in the tertiary stage of syphilis. Another series of elements concerned the inferences about the morality of Daly. *The Times* reported that when Daly entered the Holborn Union Workhouse he described himself as a "single man", again put in quotation marks by *The Times*; in fact he was married. This statement was left as it is without further comment. Then the master of the workhouse added a few comments about his wife. William Francis said:

> She was always respectably dressed when visiting him, and conducted herself like a respectable woman and one who had no means. She

[86] *Morning Chronicle*, 15 May 1845.
[87] *The Times*, 28 December 1864, p.10.

> seemed to be quite above the class that he was accustomed to see as paupers.[88]

Because Daly never mentioned having a wife during the trial, Daly's widow was required to show a certificate of marriage, which she did. She also added that they wanted to keep it secret for reasons that are not explained. It is just said "as she was in a situation" without further explanations.[89] 'In a situation' meant that she had a job. At that time women were usually dismissed from jobs if they married, especially if they were in domestic service, so it may just be that they were keeping the marriage secret so that she could keep working (and earning money). Dr John Norton, medical officer of the workhouse, said that Daly had acute rheumatic fever, 'apart from any local mischief'. As previously, these are hints dropped which remain undeveloped: it is not clear what they mean by 'local mischief'. According to the medical book it appears that Dr Lewis might have not paid daily visits to Daly: Dr Lewis said in relation to the medical books that other people are in charge of filling in the columns of the books, he just pays visits every day to every pauper. He said: 'It appears from a "pip" put opposite each case that I visit every case every day, and that is correct with very few exceptions. My initials are intended as a guarantee of accuracy'.[90] This "pip" is interesting because this was another way of referring to syphilis. Often the term 'Spanish pip' or 'orange pip' is used, rather than pip alone. However, in this case it might be just a mark, a dot, rather than a word. It is difficult to establish as the author's forename does not appear in the articles or in other documents.

[88] *The Times*, 9 January 1865, p.10.
[89] *The Times*, 16 January 1865, p.6.
[90] *The Times*, 10 January 1865, p.10.

The rapid progression of the sores, as in the case of Holding, can be seen as suspicious. According to the witness they evolved in just three days. When Mr Shuter was interrogated he explained that bed-sores usually have two causes: the first one is insistent pressure on the same parts of the body over a prolonged period of time; the second one, and this is a clear reference to syphilis, is low fever 'in which the vital powers generally were depressed by some poisonous influence of the blood'.[91] Some wounds could be bed-sores while others could be gangrenes. For instance, Norton noticed that the third wound was superficial while others were in a much more advanced state.[92] Another common element with Holding's story is the shocking conditions in which the sores present themselves: to the eyes of the expert it is surprising how bad they look. These are not normal bed-sores but more serious afflictions. The blueness of the lips and the coldness of the extremities were attributed to a disease of the lungs.[93]

There were many such hints in the case of Richard Gibson as well. From the very beginning it was established that he died from an effusion of serum in the brain, and his death was accelerated by neglect at St. Giles workhouse.[94] In this case it seems clearer it could be a case of venereal complaint. This is because *The Times* writes that, as he entered the workhouse, he was immediately put in a '"ward" (*The Times* uses the quotation marks) 'set apart for the reception of patients so afflicted'.[95] This ward could be 'the venereal ward', which was set up to host syphilitic patients. These wards were often called 'itchy wards' for they contained people with skin conditions. Gibson himself had something more than bed-sores, as his skin had

[91] *The Times*, 16 January 1865, p.6.
[92] *The Times*, 11 January 1865, p.11.
[93] *The Times*, 13 January 1865, p.10.
[94] *The Times*, 31 March 1865, p.11.
[95] *The Times*, 18 May 1865, p.11.

plenty of spots caused by itch and vermin.[96] The article terminates with an appeal to reconsider the state in which inmates are kept in these "wards".

In conclusion, there were many ways the press could allude to 'syphilis' without mentioning it directly. Whereas sores generated by syphilis were ascribed to the morality of the individual, bed-sores seem to be more of a reminder of the negligence of the people who should have taken care of the individual. In the case studies analysed it is likely that the patients suffered from both bed-sores and local gangrenes but the newspapers, which adhered to the direction of the inquests, focused on the bed-sores instead - probably partly influenced by the difficulty of framing a topic which was highly controversial at that time.

How to make a bed

After 1850, 'bed-sores' began to be a regular item in both national and local newspapers. The number of hits returned by the digital archive signals an increase during the second half of the nineteenth century: the term had become more familiar to the public. The term 'bed-sore' appears in very different contexts and was adapted every time to the target audience of the paper where it appeared. These bits of news contained information on the prevention of bed-sores, their treatment, and stories of people who died from bed-sores. The discourse surrounding bed-sores revolves around key themes: instructions on the prevention and care of bed-sores, the importance of the bed arrangements, and the moral duty of getting information about them. Aled Jones has observed that the press often acts like dripping water, reiterating the same argument, the same aspect, the same mental and moral

[96] *The Times*, 17 May 1865, p.13.

undertone.[97] These news items about bed-sores appeared regularly, like drops of water, with variations that will be explored here.

Bed-sores were often associated with the name of Florence Nightingale, because in her diaries she wrote a note about them. The conditions of the bed where the patient is held is one of the key themes around which discussions of bed-sores revolve. The weekly *Lancaster Gazette* quotes Florence Nightingale from *Notes on Nursing* in the article 'A patient's bed-room as it ought to be', saying that a patient should be prevented from putting his head under the bedclothes. This is also to avoid another skin condition, known as scrofula, a constitutional disease causing an enlargement of the lymphatic glands.[98] Still on 'how to make a bed', the household column of the liberal *Hampshire Telegraph* publishes an article giving instructions which seem mainly to follow Florence Nightingale's notes: 'a blanket should not be placed between the patient and the bed because being hot and moist favours the formation of bed-sores'.[99] Whereas in *The Times* we have seen the bed-sores as a central theme to develop an argument against the Poor Law Amendment Act and as a means to improve the poor houses' infirmaries, in these cases their importance lies in being part of a list of interests of the Victorian frame of mind. Bed-sores are an everyday problem that the carers of sick or disabled people had to deal with. The *Preston Guardian*, a successful liberal local newspaper, wrote about bed-sores in its literature and poetry section with the title 'Sleeping under the clothes'.[100] The Nightingale extract comes along with other literary excerpts dealing with physical issues, such as gravitation, zoology, the analysis of a gunshot wound on an elephant,

[97] Frank Taylor, *The Newspaper Press* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1898) cited in Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press. Newspapers, Power and Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Ashgate, 1996), p.96.
[98] *Lancaster Gazette*, 28 January 1860.
[99] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 21 November 1885.
[100] *Preston Guardian*, 21 April 1860.

and public affairs. This gives an idea of the relative weight that such an issue might assume in different locations within a newspaper. Similarly, bed-sores are placed under the literature section in the *Daily News*, launched in 1846 under the editorship of Charles Dickens: this was a morning newspaper intended to be a rival to the *Morning Chronicle*.[101] As in *The Times*, The piece focused on the workhouse. It is an extract from social reformer Frances Power Cobbe's pamphlet on *The Workhouse as an Hospital*, where the problem of the size of beds is discussed, as is their relationship with the formation of bed-sores, and the lack of trained nurses. The extract proposes a reflection on reading about bed-sores which suits the newspapers, because often the paper reflects on why it is worth publishing certain details, or why the audience should know about those details. In this case Cobbe says: 'No matter how dreary that subject may be, the fire of her earnest spirit lights it up and shines on those who read'.[102] This is another echo of how journalist and coroner Thomas Wakley used to address the public to underline the significance of the cases discussed.[103] 'Sensations of the dying' is the title of a piece by the pro-Conservative weekly *Aberdeen Journal* and, similarly to the previous example, it explains the necessity of talking publicly about bed-sores. The following is a quote, reprinted by the *Quarterly Review* and which also appears in the *Leeds Mercury*:

> Perceptions which had occupied the entire man could hardly be obliterated in the instant of recovery; or if any one were inclined to adopt the solution, there is yet a proof that the callousness is real, in the unflinching manner in which bed sores are rolled upon, that are too tender to bear touching when sense is restored. Wherever there is insensibility virtual death precedes death itself, and to die is to awake in another world.[104]

[101] John Kofron, "Daily News", in Brake and Demoor (eds.) (2002), p.158.
[102] *Daily News*, 21 January 1862.
[103] See p.173.
[104] *Aberdeen Journal*, 21 November 1849.

The article is about the feelings that precede death. It focuses on the gradual loss of sensibility of the body which sometimes precedes painfully the loss of brain functions. The painful sensation of the bed-sores is a sign that sensibility has not yet gone and recovery might be possible.

The *Penny Illustrated Paper* in its Family Column gives what it calls 'Medical Counsels to Plain People'.[105] The article argues that bed-sores appear mostly on those parts of the body compressed towards the bed, such as the lower part of the body, the back, the hips and the shoulder-blades. Thin people would be particularly vulnerable, probably because of the major protuberance of bones. In this article there is a point on the division of tasks between nurses and doctors. It seems that nurses are in charge of preventing bed-sores, whereas it is up to doctors to deal with them once they are already formed. The article also gives a recipe as a remedy against bed-sores: it says that when redness occurs it should be treated with brandy mixed up with the white of three eggs. The *Bristol Mercury* and *Daily Post* suggested to their readers to treat a potential bed-sore with whisky or gin, and added that good nursing should prevent the formation of bed-sores, because it is very difficult to treat them later on when they are already developed. However, changing the position of the patient, using a circular water pillow and using balsam of Peru might help.[106] In terms of medical remedies we find advertisements of pills, such as Brandreth's pills as a way to cure or prevent bed-wounds, but as a matter of fact this is one of the cases where human care cannot be substituted by a pill. Nurses should observe attentively and also touch the skin of bed-ridden patients, says the *Manchester Times*,

[105] *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 14 December 1861.
[106] *Bristol and Mercury Daily Post*, 7 August 1886.

and a dry or moist, or cold or hot skin should alert the nurses and remind them to wash the skin of those patients often.[107]

In 1886 the *Bristol Mercury* announced the launch of the first of a series of lectures about nursing. The lectures were held at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, delivered by the matron of the hospital, called Miss Manson, whose talk stressed that bed-sores would be avoided through good nursing practice.[108] Further instructions include the importance of physical activity and nutritional advice, though these are less critical. A report compiled in 1853 and made public by the *Morning Post* stated that, along with the provision of beds and bedding, the guardians of the asylum should take the patients out daily and encourage them to exercise.[109] On the same lines, three years later the *Morning Post* called for more exercise and occupations for the inmates.[110] The absence of bed-sores in the patients was usually used as a mark of the good quality of a hospital. Some infirmaries promoted their institutions by using the absence of bed-sores to prove that they took care of the patients. South Hampshire Infirmary is advertised in the *Hampshire Advertiser & Salisbury Guardian* as a good public space, in contrast to the private space from which a girl arrives in an emaciated state.[111] In essence, a little girl arrived at the infirmary covered with bed-sores caused by lying in one position, having slept with her mother and other sick children in the same bed for many weeks. At her admission, according to the paper, she was provided with a water bed and a separate room, nutritious food and wine. The publicity is aimed at raising funds to support the infirmary as a place where the sick poor found recovery.

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[107] *Manchester Times*, 4 December 1861.
[108] *Bristol Mercury*, 24 July 1886.
[109] *Morning Post*, 1 August 1853.
[110] *Morning Post*, 5 March 1856.
[111] *Hampshire Advertiser & Salisbury Guardian*, 5 December 1846.

It is very difficult to establish the total number of people suffering from, or dying of, bed-sores in British workhouses. Sometimes it might happen that the number of sufferers from bed wounds is boosted to increase hostility towards the Poor Law Board, as occurs in the year 1867. At the centre of this dispute was a pamphlet, a newspaper titled *Good Words* and the better-known daily evening *Pall Mall Gazette*, defined by Cristopher A. Kent "an elegant little two-column daily evening tabloid printed on good paper."[112] A doctor called Norman Macleod wondered how the nation could help the poor, saying that in London workhouse hospitals contain 16,000 bed-ridden poor people, the majority of whom were dying of bed-sores. The purpose of the pamphlet was to organise people to form a voluntary association for relieving paupers. He published the data found in *Good Words* and from the pamphlet: those data were reprinted by the *Pall Mall Gazette,* which questioned the facts. However, a few days later Macleod sent a letter rectifying the matter, saying that the data were uncorrect. Thus it was the doctor himself who admits that the figures may have been overstated. In a second article printed by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he says that in the London workhouses the number of sick confined to bed was in fact around 6,000, and 'in nine of the largest workhouses there are a maximum of six cases of bed-sores'.[113]

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the presence of the skin in newspapers functioned as a vehicle for bringing the consequences of the New Poor Law into the public eye. As we have seen, the popularization of the knowledge of bed-sores in the press followed

[112] Cristopher Andrew Kent, 'Pall Mall Gazette', in Brake and Demoor (eds.) (2009), op. cit., p.477.
[113] *Pall Mall Gazette,* 18 October 1867.

two routes. On the one hand are legal cases involving the death of workhouse inmates. The press coverage of the inquests emphasized the role played by the *decubitus ulcer* in causing the deaths. The inquiries generated a debate over the failures of the New Poor Law. On the other hand, the understanding of the *pressure ulcer* was enhanced by bits of information disseminated in the papers, including how to take care of the sick, nursing practice or basic medical knowledge for self-help. In the cases of Holding, Daly and Gibson, whose bed-sores initiated a debate over the treatment of the pauper in workhouses, there are two elements in particular that need to be discussed. Firstly, the absence of the word 'skin' when the articles talk about bed-sores; secondly the importance of the letters sent by some witnesses (a doctor, a friend, an officer) in contrast to the lack of medical records, and the ability of *The Times* to detect those epistolary exchanges and form them into nodal points for the unfolding of the stories. From a semantic point of view, one of the most striking elements, when looking at the press coverage of inquests upon the deaths caused or accelerated by bed-sores, is the very infrequent use of the word 'skin'. A keyword-based search with 'skin' reveals cases of bed-sores because sometimes the word is mentioned, but to cover all cases of bed-sores treated it is necessary to change the keyword and use 'bed-sore' itself. Pressure ulcers usually begin with a reddening of the skin and the observation of the skin is essential in terms of prevention, because, as we have seen, it is possible to detect the formation of bed-sores at their early stage. However, when those cases come to public attention it is usually when the bed-sores are already very deep, and have travelled through the *epidermis* and begun to damage the tissues underneath. In other words, the skin has been eroded and the wounds look like ulcers: in the worst cases the bone is in sight. The bed-sore destroys the skin and leaves a lack of skin, a hole. So this might explain why, though

starting from the skin, the portrayal of bed-sores tends to leave out the concept of skin as a whole. This is also because 'skin' is a generic term, while 'bed-sore' is specific: it does not refer to any wound but to a wound that could be linked to lying habits. Therefore, the reason for the lack of the term 'skin' in the media coverage of pressure ulcers might be because, as a matter of fact, a bed-sore suggests the erosion of the skin and this erosion is referred to by its specific medical popular term.

The second point has to do with the duty to print words telling the story. There is a thread between the bed-sores as mark of neglect, the lack of written medical records, the lack of 'patient narrative', the function of the press and the letters of the readers. All these marks and signs, whether on skin or on paper, came to rectify the absence of any first-hand account of the patient. One of the most recurrent problems during the trials was the lack of medical records. However, the observations of the wounds on the bodies of the victims prompted members of the medical profession to use *The Times* as an instrument to denounce maltreatment in the infirmaries. In most of these cases the investigation was initiated after letters were sent to *The Times*. The paper was then not only a medium but also an agent for the sequence of events: it was an active participant. *The Times* found in bed-sores related issues, stories of general interest for the reader. It presented the *decubitus ulcer* as a 'mark of neglect'. It revealed the poor conditions in which inmates were kept under the New Poor Law. *The Times* used those stories instrumentally to highlight the failure of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act to address the problem of poverty in Britain.

The press coverage of deaths by bed-sores, along with columns on public health, also gave the opportunity to discuss publicly the prevention and treatment of

the bed-sore. As for the case of flogging, *The Times* is the paper which combined the medical discussion brought out by the clinical observation of the wounds in the forensic examination with the anti-Poor Law Campaign. Other newspapers did mention the cases of bed-sores, but the news coverage facilitated the popularization of knowledge of this type of wound, rather than diffusing awareness of workhouses and lunatic asylums' problems. When this happens the newspaper reflects another aspect of its nature, which is continuing a tradition of mentioning cases of venereal disease in an encrypted way. If *The Times* was a medical journal it could be blamed for failing to provide its readers with a truthful account of deaths by syphilis. However, as stated elsewhere, *The Times* put its topics, for instance the skin, in a kaleidoscope-like system where the same figure, the same topic, creates different images and different stories. And probably that is why the newspaper lingers so much on the skin: it enables the newspaper to express its nature in all its ambivalent, multifaceted and contradictory aspects.

Chapter 6. The skin of the Working Class

The *Illustrated London News* (*ILN*) and the *Graphic* were striking examples of Victorian newspapers celebrating the achievements of the industrial revolution in elaborate wood-engravings. The former was engaged in promoting the centrality of London as the commercial and imperial capital of the world, and regularly honoured its metropolitan architectural spectacle.[1] The latter, the *ILN*'s most successful competitor, was more concerned with aesthetic output and managed to put together fine art painting and weekly topics of public interest.[2] Both aimed at the middle class, these pictorial newspapers seldom acknowledged in their engravings that the rapid development of the industrial system was leaving its marks on the hands of those who were directly involved in the making of Great Britain. In the Victorian period the victims of occupational diseases suffered in isolation, hidden from public view in remote factories, collieries, mining villages and slum wards of cities.[3] The growing capitalist class had its anxieties and was not aware of its responsibility for the working class as there had not been any tradition of protecting it.[4] As Michael Harris observed, newspapers' employees too, in particular printers and engravers, were victims of occupational diseases. Harris argued that the cost of books, periodicals and newspapers was not paid by the readers but by the health of the people who worked in the grim conditions of the printing office.[5] The 1868 *Report*

[1] Brian Maidment, 'Illustrated London News', in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (London: Academia Press, 2009), p.302.
[2] Brian Maidment, 'Thomas William Luson', (*DNJ*, 2009), p.623.
[3] Peter. W. J. Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p.3.
[4] Robert J. Evans, *The Victorian Age 1815-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1954), p.17.
[5] Michael Harris, 'Printers' Diseases: the Human Cost of a Mechanical Process', in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds.) *Medicine, Mortality and the Book Trade* (New Castle: Folkestone, 1998).

on the Sanitary Circumstances of the Printers of London provided this picture of a printing working environment:

> Apprentices were pale and thin with sunken features; readers were commonly pale, thin and depressed; the great majority of compositors were thin, pale and with unusually large pupils.[6]

A typical trade mark of printing was that the hands of compositors showed calluses on the palms and at the tips of the thumb and index fingers on the right hand, from manoeuvring the metallic type.[7] In a rare discussion of the occupational diseases in the printing trade *The Times*, through a letter sent by the physician John Charles Hall titled 'The Special Diseases of Artisans', explained that print makers, in a similar way to other artisans who deal with lead, found their fingers cold and benumbed because of the repeated action of picking up the type.[8] Lead is a cheap and malleable nonferrous metal which constitutes the basis for type metal. Lead poisoning is one of the oldest occupational health threats: the lead is mainly absorbed through respiratory and gastrointestinal systems while its organic compounds can be absorbed through intact skin.[9] *The Times'* article on the diseases of the artisans acknowledged the risks of inhalation, ingestion or direct contact with lead. In fact the newspapers urged anyone handling lead to change clothes and wash after work and before having meals.[10] Apparently *The Times*, which in the 1860s employed around 300 printers,

[6] Edward Smith, 'Report on the Sanitary Circumstances of Printers in London' (Appendix 11) in John Simon, *Sixth report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council*, vol. 28 (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1864), p.386.
[7] Louis Schwartz et al., *Occupational Diseases of the Skin* (London: Henry Kimpton, 1957), p.542.
[8] *The Times*, 27 October 1865, p.4.
[9] Alf Fischbein and Howard Hu, 'Occupational and Environmental Exposure to Lead', in William N. Rom and Steven B. Markowitz (eds.), *Environmental and Occupational Medicine* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 1992), p.982.
[10] *The Times*, 27 October 1865, p.4.

utilized good quality machinery and had good sanitary arrangements for its employees.[11]

This chapter seeks to explain how, despite a growing public interest in the skin and despite increasing medical attention to dermatological studies, occupational skin diseases were mostly neglected or poorly covered by the weekly and daily press of the second half of the nineteenth century. The wound, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, had proved to be a powerful element of evidence from a legal point of view. It also worked as an argument, able to provoke strong emotional reactions which were often channelled into movements for social change. In addition, the news coverage of the skin took the form of knowledge that attracted readers who wanted to know more about the functioning of their own skin, and this reinforced the position of the newspaper as a means of disseminating information about health. Nevertheless, the news coverage of occupational skin diseases was a slightly more problematic topic to treat directly. In the previous cases the institutions under accusation were the army and the workhouses, which already did not have much sympathy from the public. But in this case it was industrialization and urbanization which happened to be under scrutiny, the same subjects represented in the spectacular engravings published in the pictorial press. Attacking the causes of occupational skin diseases could mean undermining the industrial system of which the newspaper was a product. The Industrial Revolution increased the magnitude and circulation of newspapers, transformed their methods of acquiring news, mechanized their printing and changed their layout and appearance.[12] As Albert Musson

[11] Harris (1998), op. cit., p.13.
[12] Albert E. Musson, 'Newspaper Printing in the Industrial Revolution', *The Economic History Review* 10:3 (1958), p.411.

observed, the factors behind these transformations included the improvement of the railway system, which allowed news to be gathered quickly and the papers to circulate widely. Coal fed the railway moving the same trains where passengers, including reporters, and newspapers travelled. But as *The Times* itself suggested 'Coal, as most of our readers know, is not found in solid masses of half a mile cube, but in veins or layers of various thickness, which have to be pursued by the miners, extracted bit by bit, and sent up to the surface'.[13] The newspaper's use of a bodily metaphor recalls real blood flowing in the real bodies of the people working into those 'veins'.

It was the publication of the scandal of the employment of children in mines, factories and as chimney sweeps which brought the conditions of the workers to the public eye in the 1840s. The Report on Child Employment of 1842 attracted the attention of the press, which could not ignore the numerous cases of deaths and the terrible working conditions underground or inside chimneys, in particular those of colliers and chimney sweeps. Although, as noted before, in these stories the focus was not directly on the skin, the wounded body was there at all times.

[13] *The Times*, 6 May 1842, p.6.

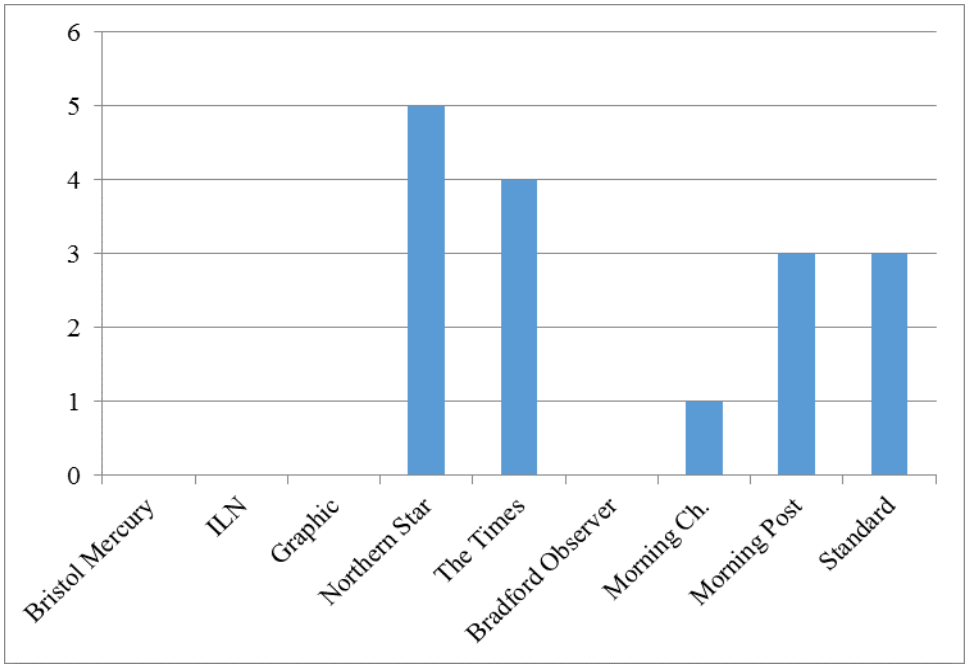

Chart 6.1 Full text search for 'skin' plus 'miners' in 1842

This chapter will look in particular at the newspaper coverage of the 1842 Commissioners' Report on Child Employment which focused on miners. The sections on the skin of miners will be followed by examples of news coverage of health problems and fatal accidents involving chimney sweeps. It will show how the national and provincial papers framed the news involving working class health and what the role of the skin was in the story's narrative. It will highlight the points where the press missed the opportunity to divulge precautionary information to the working class and the less frequent occasions when it did not.

'The Wounded Soldiers of Industry'

The systematic study of occupational health only began in Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century. A first detailed description of work-related diseases appeared in Italy in the year 1700, when physician Bernardino Ramazzini in his *De Morbis Artificium Diatriba*

addressed the health hazards of bakers, salt miners, millers and many other categories of worker. As Louis Schwartz observed, Ramazzini was not the first to write about this topic: the Renaissance physician *Paracelsus* had described alterations in skin caused by salt compounds in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, Ramazzini's work was the first clear and detailed treatise on occupational disease.[14] In Britain it was the surgeon Percivall Pott who added a significant chapter to the history of the field in 1775, by discovering the causes of the cancer of the scrotum which mainly affected chimney sweeps. Yet it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that occupational diseases acquired greater attention from medical expertise and legislation changed accordingly. In the nineteenth century, occupational diseases were considered an unavoidable drawback of working life. Miner's asthma, also called black spit, matchmaker's necrosis, and chimney sweep's cancer were part of the Victorian lexicon.[15] The workmen who suffered accidents and injuries were 'The wounded soldiers of industry', in the words utilised by the statesman Austen Chamberlain. This expression appeared in an address made by him at Selly Oak, near Birmingham, to sustain the candidature of John W. Wilson for MP of North Worcestershire. Chamberlain pointed to the lack of legislation for the conditions of working people, which the political programme of his candidate would remedy.[16] The phrase associates workers with soldiers because the industrial labour force was conceived as a sort of army with the responsibility of maintaining British economic supremacy in the face of increasing overseas competition.[17]

Often the tone of the press was patronizing, in particular with reference to the lack of hygiene. The letter in *The Times* mentioned previously, on 'The Special

[14] Schwartz (1957), op. cit., p.18.
[15] Anthony, S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives, Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.264.
[16] *The Times*, 20 July 1895, p.7.
[17] Bartrip (1983), op. cit., p.5.

Diseases of Artisans' listed a few instances of preventable conditions mainly connected to the handling of poisonous material with bare hands. According to the letter the masters in particular were failing to take the preventive measures that would have reduced the risks: 'The painter, for instance, will eat his dinner with his unwashed fingers and thumb while handling the lead for the dipper, though the contact of the metal with his skin brings on saturnine poisoning, which in extreme cases ends in fatal mania'.[18] The letter was a follow up to a lecture delivered by John C. Hall at the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences in Sheffield. It also added that makers of cocoa-rind hafts and handles for knives suffered from an unnamed skin disease resulting from dealing with substances that obstruct the pores of the skin. Furthermore, it mentioned that making matches could lead to disfigurement: when the workers dipped the matches in liquid phosphorus, the fumes became volatized and attacked the bones of the jaw, eventually destroying them. Lead usually caused a loss of sensation in the fingers, eventually causing paralysis of the extensor muscles of the wrist. Those mainly affected would be file makers, house painters and potters.

This thesis has shown that the increased attention devoted by the newspapers to the skin was also enhanced by a medical profession which began to specialize in dermatology in the nineteenth century. Consequently, newspapers started to fill up their columns with articles, editorials, lectures and book reviews dealing with all the attributes of the human skin. One of the reasons why the press might not have given much space to the skin diseases of industrial workers is that the topic was neglected by the medical profession itself. As Peter Bartrip noted, this lack

[18] *The Times*, 27 October 1865, p.4.

of interest almost sounds ironic considering that two of the categories most at risk were physicians and surgeons themselves. When attempting to explain why politicians, bureaucrats and social investigators disregarded occupational health, Bartrip said that industrial diseases evolved over a long duration of time, while it was the atypical 'single-event catastrophe' that caught newspapers' interest and the public's imagination.[19] As Brian Lewis stated, when reflecting on the risks of mining, the Victorian attitude was that of stressing the dramatic and ignoring the mundane dangers of this occupation.

> To a generation which remembers Aberfan, the horror with which the people of Barnsley heard of the Oaks explosion and 334 dead in December 1866 is easily imagined, but it is not so easy to picture the suffering of a man dying over a number of years from pneumoconiosis. There is a saying among pitmen that for every ton of coal brought to the surface a pint of blood is spilt […] Miners and their wives over generations learn with almost stoic logic to accept violent injury, but it is not so easy to live with chronic illness.[20]

As for occupational skin diseases in particular, they did not arouse great interest because the occurrence of trauma and respiratory diseases was greater. However, William Donaldson explained that, although less frequent, occupational dermatitis was a major cause of disability in mining:

> Breach or maceration of the stratum corneum may be produced by friction, heat, trauma, and excessive sweating, all of which may predispose to the development of dermatitis. In certain sites the opening of the hair follicles, sweat and sebaceous glands may provide a portal

[19] Peter W. J. Bartrip, *The Home Office and the Dangerous Trades: Regulating Occupational Disease in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), p.10.
[20] Brian Lewis, *Coal Mining in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Bristol: Longman, 1971), p.46.

> of entry into the epidermis, especially if the irritant or sensitizer is a fat soluble.[21]

The medical profession's lack of interest in occupational diseases was linked to economic factors: the medical assistance of working class people was not a remunerative practice.[22]In addition, workers received no, or only a very poor form of, legal protection: if they got injured in the workplace they would not receive any compensation. For example, in the case of mining, the British legal system was designed to give protection to the pit owner and his mines rather than the health of the employee.[23] A person disabled by his job could then only turn to the street or the workhouse. This was the fate of Timothy Daly, whose story was discussed in the previous chapter, the ex-railway worker who was forced to leave his job and enter the workhouse due to deteriorating rheumatism. Before 1836 there was no record of an employee suing his master for damages following an accident or disease caused by work, nor was there an Act of Parliament that offered guarantees to workers.[24] Things started to change in 1842, which was a particularly crucial year. Not only did this year mark the publication of Edwin Chadwick's *Report on Sanitary Conditions* and the foundation of the first illustrated newspaper, the *ILN*, but also the publication of another report containing engravings other than those circulated in the *ILN* which greatly impressed the collective imagination. This was the first *Report on the Employment of Children and Young Persons in the Mines* (Fig. 6.1).[25]

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[21] Donald Williamson and H. R. Vickers, 'Occupational Dermatitis in Miners', in John M. Rogan (ed.) *Medicine in the Mining Industries* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p.179.
[22] Bartrip (2002), op. cit., p.3.
[23] Geoffrey Hodgson, 'The History of Coal Miners' Skin Diseases' *Wales and Medicine. An Historical Survey*, Ninth British Congress on the History of Medicine Cardiff: British Society for the History of Medicine (1973), p.55.
[24] Bartrip (2002), op.cit. p.1.
[25] The reports of each commissioner have been edited by Ian Winstanley and digitalized by the Coal Mining Resource Centre. They are available at 1842 Royal Commission Reports http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/site/literature/royalcommissionreports/.

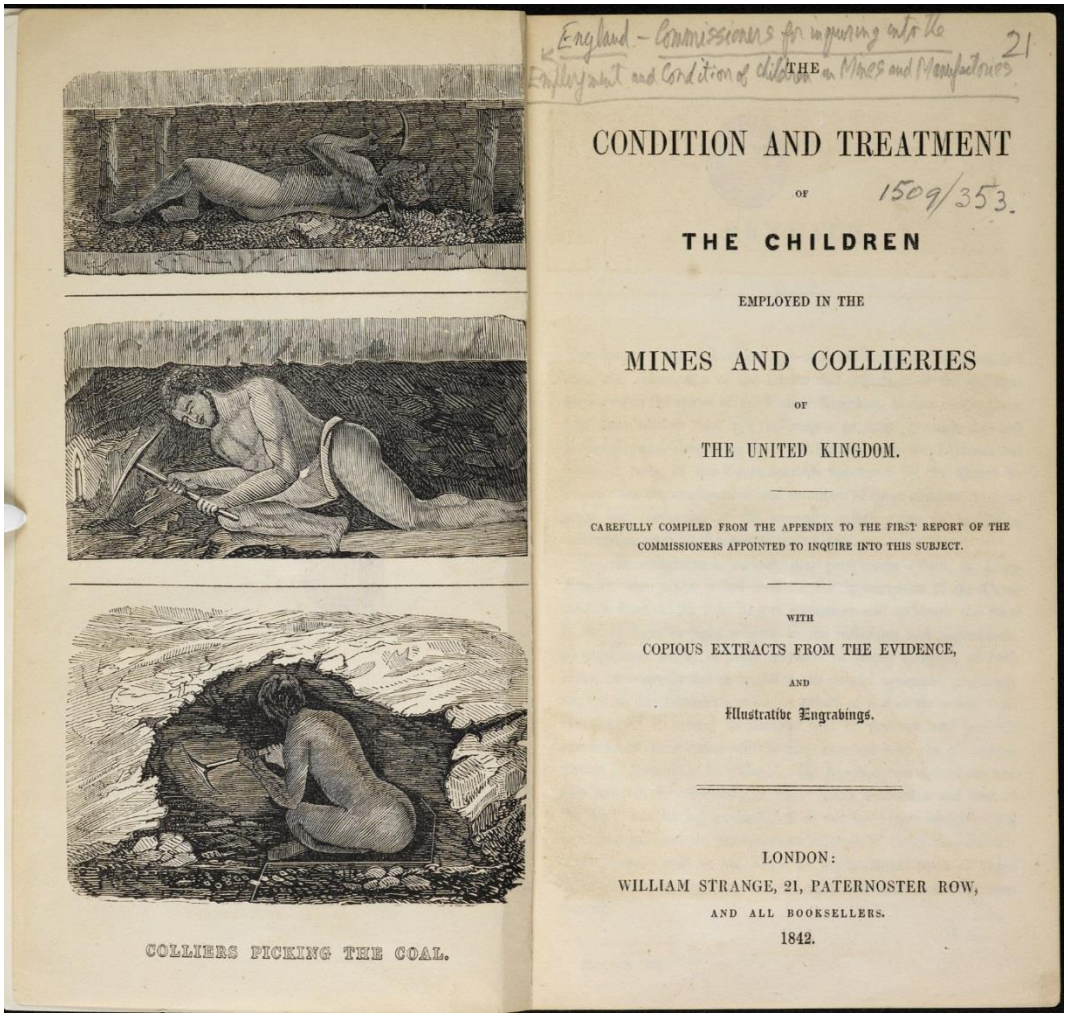

Figure 6.1 Front matter of *The Condition and Treatment of Children Employed in the Mines and Collieries* (British Library).

Bare skin in the mines

Coal ruled the nineteenth century because it provided the fundamental material basis for the Industrial Revolution.[26] By 1700 this combustible had already replaced wood as the main fuel for salt production; soap, sugar, starch, candle, dye and textile manufacture also depended largely on coal.[27] In 1840 Queen Victoria, following a House of Commons address moved by philanthropist and politician Lord Anthony

[26] George Rosen, *The History of Miners' Diseases* (New York: Shuman's, 1943), p.137.
[27] Lewis (1971), op. cit., p.9.

Ashley Cooper, appointed a Royal Commission to investigate working conditions in coal mines. Cooper was a keen social reformer committed to the moral and social improvement of the working class. In particular, he believed that children should spend time under instruction in school rather than in factories and collieries. The Royal Commission was appointed when the working conditions of children and women in the mines had started to stir public attention due to a series of strikes held in different coalfields nationwide. The Commissioners explored the coalfields of the country covering the whole territory from Scotland to Ireland, from Northern England to Southern England and from Wales to the Midlands. Amongst the officers were professional physicians sent to assess the health and hygiene conditions of the mines.

The report of the Children's Employment Commission was printed on 7 May 1842, after an ineffective attempt to postpone its publication at a time when Britain was being destabilized by economic crisis and the working-class Chartist movement.[28] This was the most significant working-class political movement of the nineteenth century, developed from the initiative of artisans and middle-class radicalism in London and Birmingham.[29] 2,000 copies of the report, around 270 pages in length with 900 further pages in appendices, were produced. The document was produced using the material provided by the commissioners appointed to record working conditions in mines. Each commissioner compiled his own report interviewing hundreds of children as well as mine owners, managers, teachers, parochial officers and doctors connected with work in the coalfield. The report soon became very popular because it displayed shocking wood engravings illustrating

[28] Angela V. John, *By the Sweat of their Brow* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p.44.
[29] Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001), p.320.

chained naked children, boys and girls dragging truckloads of coal. British newspapers reprinted several extracts of the written report but most of them omitted to publish the engravings. Some of the newspapers and periodicals which covered the topic felt the whole subject to be lacking in taste: the high Tory *Quarterly Review* provided a prose account of conditions while the *Illustrated London News*, which might have been thought to be interested in publishing the engravings, did not feel it to be 'appropriate reading matter for its readers'.[30] The *Manchester Guardian* expressed its doubt whether it was opportune to publish the details of the report 'which cannot fail to have excited, in the minds of those who have read it, as much surprise as disgust'.[31] The chartist newspaper *Northern Star* defined the lithographs 'rude but effective'.[32] The causes of disgust and surprise were aroused by acknowledging that children were employed in grim conditions and the fact that women and men worked naked there as the temperature underground could be very high.

In addition to the impressing illustrations, the second remarkable characteristic of the report is that it contained first-hand accounts of the miners. Entering the pits at a very young age meant that miners were mostly illiterate, which is why the oral traditions of miners usually constituted the first accounts of life in mines. As with soldiers and sailors, miners' adventures and misfortunes were assigned to the sung word. As Lewis pointed out, factory workforces do not have a strong oral tradition as they belong to a recent past, while miners have a long history of oral folklore dating back to the Paleolithic age. From the early

[30] John (1980), op. cit., p.47.
[31] *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1842, p.2.
[32] *Northern Star*, 21 May 1842.

eighteenth century printed mining songs circulated, in particular in the North East, recounting the dangers of the trade.[33] These ballads contained suggestions and tips for survival making up for the lack of 'official' information about the risks of mining. The interviews published in the 1842 Report are a repetition in prose of what miners' songs had been saying in music decades before. One of these, *Slaves of the Mine* says:

> The stalwart frame of robust man
> the sylph-like form of women frail,
> The tender flesh of children wan
> Come all within the mining pale
> To work for ducals' grand regale.[34]

These verses exemplify the physical appearance of those working in the mines, or what they would have looked like under the cover of black dust usually clothing their faces. In fact, although miners are usually associated with their black face-appearance, under this layer was hidden a pallor and emaciation due to anaemia.[35] The song contains two motifs which are recurrent in the press coverage of work in the mines: first was the problem of employment of women in the mines and the moral implications of having *sylph-like women* half-naked working closely with men. The second motif was the effects of that type of work on the tender flesh of children which, we will learn, can lose its tenderness to be replaced with a hardened and callous cutaneous layer. Another song, *The Collier Lass*, highlighted a further typical way of framing labourers in news, which is to situate

[33] Lewis (1971), op. cit., p.30.
[34] In Arthur Wilson, *Lays, Tales, and Folk Lore of the Mines* (Perth: Patersons), 1944.
[35] Anaemia, together with diseases of the chest, pustular eruptions and rheumatism were mentioned in the list of occupational diseases found in coal miners in Alfred Riembault's *Hygiène des ouvriers mineurs dans les exploitation houillères* (1861).

them within the necessity of the craft: as *The Times* suggested earlier, somebody had to dig the coal in order to have it available for its various uses.

> I keep up my spirits, I sing and look merry
> although I am but a poor collier lass
> […]
> The mine may fall in, I may be killed or wounded,
> May perish by damp or the fire of the train.
> And what would you do it weren't for our labour?[36]

In June 1842, one month after the publication of the report, Lord Ashley presented a petition for regulating the age and sex of people employed underground. On the occasion of a House of Lords meeting discussing Ashley's proposal it was said that workers in collieries were neglected because they were considered uneducated and aggressive people, such that 'in no part of the habitable globe, perhaps, is there such utter indifference displayed towards the life and limbs of human beings as in these collieries'.[37] In the light of the prejudices surrounding miners, the publication of their first-hand accounts of life in the mines acquired an even greater importance in restoring their dignity in the public eye. By listening to the miners' first-hand accounts, the commissioners gave them the opportunity to express their humanity. This is probably the greatest difference from the case studies analysed previously in this thesis. In the case of the flogging at Hounslow and the neglect in workhouses the people who died of violence or neglect seldom spoke. They were silent characters, and by contrast their wounds acquired a higher resonance. The news coverage of the 1842 Report was different because the miners described their own skin's condition with their own words. Their words were free from any rhetoric or medical

[36] Roy Palmer, *Poverty Knock. A Picture of Industrial Life in the Nineteenth Century through Songs, Ballads and Contemporary Accounts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p.44.
[37] *The Times*, 8 June 1842, p.3.

terminology: they actually show how people with little or no education understood and spoke about the skin.

A selection of the interviews published in the report was reprinted by the newspapers, as shown in the examples that follow. The presence of interviews, though not carried out by *The Times*' reporters, is an anticipation of the journalistic interview whose invention is usually ascribed to the era of New Journalism. Shortly after the appearance of the report, *The Times* published an editorial which reprinted *verbatim* some of the interviews with the children who described the effects of the chain and the girdle on their skin:

> About a year and a half ago I took to the girdle and chain. I do not like it. It hurts me. It rubs my skin off. I often feel pain. I have often had blisters on my side, but when I was more used to it it would not blister, but it smarted very badly.[38]

Similarly, Isaac Tipton, another miner, 16 years old, mentioned the problems caused by the girdle:

> The girdle often makes blisters. I have had pieces like shillings and half-crowns, with the skin cocking up, all full of water, and when I put on the girdle the blisters would break and the girdle would stick; and next day they would fill again. These blisters give very great pain.[39]

Children were usually in charge of opening and closing the doors in the tunnels in order to monitor the passage of air in the mine.[40] The older boys and girls were also in charge of dragging the coal trucks, almost crawling in narrow tunnels. When the children told the commissioners about their blisters it might well have been the first

[38] *The Times*, 14 May 1842, p.5.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Evans (1954), op. cit., p.94.

time they ever spoke about them, due to being intimidated by the masters. In the report provided by James Mitchell, who documented the working conditions in the mines of Shropshire, one of the miners interviewed told the commissioner when the skin broke and the blood ran down, they dared to say nothing for the fear of being beaten.[41] *The Times* editorial commented on these stories by expressing revulsion at the barbaric practices but at the same time it eased the effect of the piece by adding that those selected by commissioners, and so those taken from the press, were the most extreme cases. In those examples found in Shropshire, the owner of the pits did not have enough capital to replace the painful 'girdle and chain' method with the new one, the more expensive 'railroad and chain', where the passage of the wagons was made smoother by the aid of the rail. *The Times*' editorial went on to list more problems faced by children: working long hours in darkness but also being subject to repeated ill-treatment as a disciplinary measure, which added distress to the injury. Regarding the use of the chain, one of the reports based in Wales – not published by any newspaper – stated that the chain excoriated the skin just at the beginning, often obliging the colliers to leave work for a couple of days, but it did not create problems later on.[42]

The theme of soft skin that becomes hard, and therefore does not hurt any more, is a question that had already been faced by physicians in the flogging case and it is misleading. In the flogging case, John White, as he was being beaten, was heard repeating several times 'Lower'. The aforementioned, famous dermatologist

[41] James Mitchell, 'On the Employment of Young Children and Young Persons in the Coal and Iron Mines of Shropshire' in Winstanley (ed.), *Children's Employment Commission* (Wigan: Picks Publishing, 1998). Available at: http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/cms/document/1842_Shropshire.pdf, p.47.
[42] Herbert Jones, 'On the Employment of Young Children and Young Persons in Mines and Mineral Works in North Wales', in Winstanley (ed.) (1998), op. cit. Available at: http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/cms/document/1842_N_Wales.pdf, p.11.

Erasmus Wilson, when re-examining the case in the *Lancet*, explained that the skin, after many blows, becomes benumbed and loses sensation so the person under the punishment might prefer to continue to receive the lashes on the same part of his body.[43] The nerves are damaged and more damage would probably not be felt by the sufferer. What happened to miners, as one of the medical commissioners wrote in a report about Leeds and Bradford, is that the skin became thickened and horny, occasioning pain and pustules.[44] Urinating on one's own hands could be used as a means to soften calluses.[45]

Half a century later miners were still fighting for their rights. On the occasion of a conference in Sheffield following a miners' strike, organised in order to prevent a further reduction of salary, the *Manchester Guardian* published an article about a dispute taking place between the employers and the Miners' Federation in the areas of Yorkshire, Nottingham and Derby. Following the dispute, the return to work had been sporadic, with miners beginning work and then stopping again.[46] The President of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation, Mr. Ashton, told the paper the particular struggle that miners endured when stopping work:

> During the long stoppage of the pits, the hands of the miners had necessarily become so soft that on restarting work they could not go off for any very long spells all at once. When they began to use the pick again in the mine the skin of their hands became blistered and broken,

[43] See p.134.
[44] William R. Wood, 'On the Employment of Young Children and Young Persons in the Mines in the Collieries and Iron Works of the towns of Bradford and Leeds', in Winstanley (ed.) (1998), op. cit. Available at: http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/cms/document/1842_Yorks_2.pdf, p.26.
[45] Geoffrey Hodgson, 'Skin Diseases of Coal Miners in Britain with Special References to the History of Changes in Mining', *J. Soc. Occup. Med.* 6 supp. (1976), p.67.
[46] This was a particularly tough strike. The *Guardian* reported that a coal dealer, William Quaile, hanged himself apparently because of an on-going depression connected to the stoppage of his business. At the same time two men died as a consequence of a fall of earth that buried them alive.

> and, combined with the effects of the coal dust, became so sore that they could only work for a few hours at a stretch until their hands became hard, and the large soggs which were always to be found between the thumb and forefinger on both hands of a collier had again become formed.[47]

The callosity of the skin often came to be associated in a metaphorical way to the callosity of the mind. In an article published by *Manchester Guardian* in 1840 a reporter investigated the condition of employment in a mine near Newcastle. The reporter acknowledged that six-year-old children had to work long hours in darkness, as they were also employed as door keepers to allow the passage of coal-trucks or in charge of loading them. The reporter said he had been told that despite the conditions children were not unhappy. Here was his argument: 'The truth is, that, by blunting the sensibilities and deadening the faculties, the mind may be rendered callous to a lot which would otherwise be too bitter for human endurance'.[48] The callosity of skin is associated with the callosity of mind in order to ease the public perception of the physical and psychological pain endured by the workers. The faulty reasoning lies in the fact that callous skin is not less vulnerable than soft skin, even though it might help a worker to carry on with work. A calloused mind does not mean that miners were happy to spend long hours in a damp, dark and dangerous environment.

Moving back to the 1842 report, one month after its release, *The Times* published a full Parliamentary debate in the House of Commons regarding the working conditions of miners. The Parliamentary debate focused on the space where people worked rather than their bodies. So the mines were said to have little

[47] *Manchester Guardian*, 9 October 1893, p.6.
[48] *Manchester Guardian*, 18 November 1840, p.4.

ventilation, being damp and loaded with carbonic acid gas that, though noxious, did not prevent work from being carried on. As for the bodies of the children the constraints of the girdle and the chains were spoken of again. Apparently this practice still prevailed in the West Midlands, in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire and many other districts, so it was more widespread than the previous editorial seemed to suggest. The newspaper coverage of working in mines entailed news coverage not only of health and medicine but also of geology. The different geological aspect of a territory impacted on the structure of the pit, with consequences for the working conditions of the colliers. The *Northern Star* reported *verbatim* the words of the commissioners saying of the coal mines:

> [they are] by far the most extensive; to employ the greatest number of children and young persons; to require different modes of working according to the geological character of the country, which exert an important influence on the condition of the workers, and particularly of those of tender age.[49]

With regard to the geological aspects, in 1857 the *British Medical Journal* published a contribution about diseases of miners in Arkendale and Swaledale in North Yorkshire. The author illustrated how, amid picturesque scenery made of craggy rocks, wood and water, hill and dale, 'the sublime, the terrific, and the magnificent, are intimately blended'. The author touched briefly on the skin, saying that the skin of the miners absorbed lead, without explaining exactly how, and then went to discuss other health issues such as respiratory problems. In the end he touched on explosions which, when not fatal, could cause disfigurement. 'Those unfortunate miners are thus branded for life'.[50]

[49] *Northern Star*, 28 May 1842.
[50] Thomas A. Jackson, 'Diseases of Miners of Arkendale and Swaledale', *BMJ*, 2:30 (1857), p.620.

The words ‘disfigurement’ and ‘disfigured’ were rarely used by the press, as the keyword-based search demonstrated. They do appear many times, but mainly in the fields of art or architecture to indicate badly realized artefacts or works. While callosities can go unnoticed by the public eye and do not create much interest, accidents related to fires below ground cannot be escaped with hardened skin. Another interview published in the 1842 report but not re-printed by newspapers is the account of an eleven-year-old air-door keeper whose face was disfigured by a fire-damp in a Welsh colliery. William Isaac, when he was interviewed (while eating bread and cheese) told the commissioner that he started to learn how to read at school but that he had to stop to work. In a note at the bottom of the interview with this boy the commissioner wrote: ‘Neglected. The whole skin of the face burned and had a very disagreeable appearance.’[51] Considering the frequent explosions in mines it is not surprising that there were many disfigured workers. ‘How many broken legs, and thighs, and arms, and shattered frames and disfigured faces, not to say anything of the frequent deaths by accidents in and connected with the pits, bear witness to this truth!’,[52] wrote a reader of *The Times*, pointing out that the miners who were rioting in Staffordshire twenty years later were right to claim better wages.

As far as the news coverage of problems affecting the skin of young miners is concerned, provincial and national newspapers did not differ significantly in the report. Radical newspapers such as the *Northern Star*, or the *Reynolds’ Newspaper* covered mining news extensively but did not provide in-depth coverage of conditions affecting the skin. The *Northern Star* was launched in Leeds in 1837 and was a

[51] Hugh Franks, ‘Report on the Employment of Children and Young Persons in the Collieries and the Iron-Works of South Wales’, in Winstanley (ed.) (1998), op. cit. Available at http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/cms/document/1842_S_Wales_1.pdf, p.62.
[52] *The Times*, 12 April 1855, p.5.

militant Chartist newspaper with the greatest readership of any provincial newspaper; the *Reynolds' Newspaper* surpassed it in 1850. Both remain examples of a new series of popular and radical newspapers.[53] In the 1840s the *Northern Star*, which was read in pubs, workshops and political meetings had a circulation of between 7,000 and 13,000, but sales decreased after 1848 when the third Chartist petition was rejected and the strength of the movement began to decline.[54] In the leading article about the Report on Child Miners the paper wrote that the interviews printed had been selected following a criterion of proximity and 'painful interest'.[55] Therefore the newspaper covered in particular the reports from Northern England. In this case we have an interest driven by talking about events affecting the neighbourhood and talking about events which have a painful attraction. A follow-up article published the same week under the title 'Slavery in Britain' explained that the 'painful interest' was created by the notification that children and adults of both sexes worked together indiscriminately. The *Northern Star* wrote of the evidence of the physical and mental deterioration caused by the type of work and by the most 'disgusting associations'.[56] The long article also reported the testimony of a witness who told the paper that sexual intercourse was frequent and consequently there were many cases of illegitimate births. The *Northern Star* devoted two long articles specifically to the interviews that appeared in the 1842 report. In those articles there was no specific mention of skin conditions but the images of the 'skin cocking up', or 'skin off' and 'skin broken', were frequent. The following reports on Chartist meetings dealing

[53] James Curran, 'The Press as an Agency of Social Control: an Historical Perspective', in George Boyce *et al.*, *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Sage, 1978), p.63
[54] Greg Vargo and Malcolm S. Chase, 'Northern Star', in Brake and Demoor (2009), op. cit., p.459.
[55] *Northern Star*, 21 May 1842.
[56] *Northern Star*, 28 May 1842.

with the issue of employment of children in mines often reported the testimony of those children who said that they had their skin stripped off.[57]

The medical problems acknowledged by the commissioners were distortion of limbs, stiffness of the joints, constitutional weakness, curvature of the spine and general debility. It could be said that the worsening of skin conditions can fall under the category of general debility, but there is no specific mention of any cutaneous conditions apart from the superficial wounds observed on their skin by the miners themselves. However, it is on the skin of the face that coal mining left its primary mark: 'One little fellow whom I endeavoured to question, could not even articulate, although his father, between whose legs he hid his little black face, as he stood before me, answered for him that he was seven years old', one of the commissioners investigating the mountain mines in Lancashire told the *Northern Star*.[58] In fact, high iron levels in the water caused some miners to have their skin and clothes dyed an ochre red.[59]

According to Angela John, whereas the Commission avoided blaming the coal masters, the newspapers accused the owners of not providing good working conditions. Furthermore, the press emphasized the moral implications of another aspect which emerged in the report and shocked public opinion: the presence of women working naked in the mines together with children and men.[60] The portrayal of young naked girls was framed by moral connotations with only a few comments on the effects of chain and girdle on the bare skin, as in the following examples. A sub-commissioner, whose report was reprinted by *The Times*, observing a girl

[57] *Northern Star*, 18 June 1842.
[58] *Northern Star*, 28 May 1842.
[59] Elijah Waring, 'Report on the Employment of Children and Young Persons in the Collieries and other Works in the Forest of Dean', in Winstanley (ed.) (1998), op. cit. Available at: http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/cms/document/1842_Forest_of_Dean.pdf, p.6.
[60] John (1980), op. cit., p.45.

working said: 'In a pit near New Mills the chain passing high up between the legs of two girls, had worn large holes in their trousers. Any sight more disgustingly indecent or revolting can scarcely be imagined than these girls at work. No brothel can beat it'.[61] However, when the words of the workers interviewed by the mining commissioners were reported, there was always a mention of the bodily conditions. In the same article, a pregnant woman named Betty Harris explained: 'I have a belt round my waist and a chain passing between my legs and I go on my hands and feet […] I have drawn till I have had the skin off me.' This expression 'I have had the skin off me' would then become the leitmotif of the news coverage of the report, being published extensively. It appeared in the London-based *Odd Fellow* which reprinted her words in an editorial attacking the House of Commons. The *Odd Fellow* was an unstamped satirical illustrated weekly keen on supporting Chartism and the working class which ended publication in 1842. It wrote:

> What wouldst thou do, if by some decree of an infamous House of Commons, or by license and permission of such scoundrel House, thy wife were to be compelled to change places with Betty Harris – to draw twelve hundred of coals till her skin came off, 'when she was in the family way?' Speak out, man![62]

A similar image could be found in the words of a representative of the guardians who, during a meeting which took place in Stoke-on-Trent opposing the employment of poor young boys, said:

> Mr Gilman strongly opposed the proposal, and drew a touching picture of the wretched condition of the boys working in these pits, who, he

[61] *The Times*, 8 June 1842, p.3.
[62] The *Odd Fellow*, 28 May 1842.

> said had the skin worked off their backs, and the hair off their heads, by having to drag through low passages.[63]

The image of the skin falling off during mining work is a recurrent problem referred to in these accounts. In fact, problems of the skin might well have been less serious but they were the most immediately visible. Blood running down from a laceration, or liquids discharged by blisters in a place where in the words of a sub-commissioner 'the human nature is so degraded', were a reminder of the workers being human. This is why a reference to the skin is always present in the accounts, and it is also a readily available proof of the pain endured. In fact, a commissioner said with regard to the testimony of an eleven-year-old girl who complained about the acts of violence she was subjected to: 'The several marks on her person and that of her sister were sufficient proofs of ill-treatment'.[64]

The skin was present in the words of the miners, but the press touched upon it without analysing it. The press mentions the skin because the miners complained about it. However, the absence of an in-depth discussion of the wounds, such as those we have seen in the chapters about flogging and bed-sores, is also due to the fact that those were prompted by *post-mortem* examinations. In the case of the miners it was not easy to account for the causes of each mark on an individual's skin, nor to exclude any connection with life outside the colliery. Moreover, in the early 1840s investigations were made difficult by the absence of coroners, particularly in areas such as Scotland.[65]

[63] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8 March 1877.
[64] Ibid.
[65] John (1980), op. cit., p.39.

Sex in the mine

The problem related to the presence of naked women in the pits is that the focus on the issue of morality diverted attention from the primary causes of injuries. Instead of discussing the potential health risks to the women, the preoccupation was mostly with the moral inappropriateness of the situation. However, even if the characteristics of the skin were not discussed extensively - at least not in the same way they were in the case of flogging or regarding neglect in workhouse infirmaries - the skin was present all the time precisely because the miners worked naked or half-naked due to the high temperatures underground.

In the Christian West the meanings projected on the naked body have most of the time been loaded with negative connotations that range from innocence to shame; from vulnerability to culpability; meanings associated with prostitutes, captives, slaves, the insane and the dead.[66] The multiple readings linked to the idea of nudity derive from contrasting cultural influences such as the classical pagan and the Judaic and Middle Eastern traditions.[67] The Church of England, in contrast to the Catholic nations, did not conceive of the nude as an embodiment of spiritual aspirations because ideas of truth and beauty and justice were better conveyed through the word - sometimes a sculpted figure but rarely the painted nude.[68] Nakedness was then not seen as a sign of vulnerability; neither did it trigger cultural associations with early Christian representation of wounded martyrs where the body was a reminder of Christ's sacrifice. The English language differentiates the

[66] Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing. Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Tunbridge Wells: Burn & Oates, 1989), pp. xi and 81.
[67] Philp Carr-Gomm, *A Brief History of Nakedness* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), p.11.
[68] Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude. Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.14

condition of being naked from the one of being nude. To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes and the word implies some of the embarrassment which most of us feel in that condition. The word nude, on the other hand, carries in educated usage no uncomfortable overtone.[69] Plato and Aristotle suggested that works of art represent nature.[70] Therefore a naked body in art is a nude because it imitates the physical world. As the Oxford Dictionary shows, the adjective 'naked' implies vulnerability, while 'nude' implies a beauty, often in aesthetic or artistic terms.[71] The nude suggests aesthetic perfection as in classical statuary or fine art painting.

Reading about the bare skin of children or young people working in the mines would seem to generate very different responses. In the Victorian era nudity was characterized by contradictions: on the one hand nudity represented the ideal form and subject in art, and on the other hand the nude was a source of moral concern seen as an encouragement to socially unacceptable sexual activities.[72] The reports of the naked children working in mines revealed that the naked body attracted attention for two different reasons. The attention was driven on the one hand by prudish preoccupations and on the other hand by an erotic attachment and curiosity. Philippa Levine argued that the ambivalent and complex Victorian attitude towards nakedness can be comprehensively understood only with reference to the experience of colonialism, whereby savagery came to be associated with lack of clothing.[73] Indeed the *ILN* refrained from publishing the images of young girls working naked but it often published images of natives naked, thus

[69] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude. A Study of Ideal Art* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1960), p.1.
[70] Aristotle (*Poetics*, chapter 9) and Plato (*Republic*, book 2, 3 and 10); see Nicholas P. Wolferstoff, 'mimesis', *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.572.
[71]"naked, adj.". OED Online. (June 2014). Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/124890 [accessed August 05, 2014].
[72] Smith (1996), op. cit., p.2.
[73] Philippa Levine, 'States of Undress: Nakedness and the Colonial Imagination', *Victorian Studies* 50:2 (2008), p.189.

'primitive' became a synonym for 'naked'. Nakedness in these cases was associated with a potent sexuality. However, the nakedness of the natives looks like an accessory: it was interesting from an anthropological point of view and therefore printed without the same moral preoccupations aroused by the images of the women in mines.The images of naked women in the pits can be viewed from two different perspectives. On the one hand, their state of nature is a reminder of sexuality. On the other hand, their state of nature is a reminder of vulnerability. In both cases it is the bared exposition which triggers the thoughts.

One of the few newspapers that published the images was the provincial paper *Bristol Mercury*, which reproduced a sketch from the report of the commissioner for the West Riding of Yorkshire, Samuel Scriven (Fig.6.2).[74] This is the only instance retrieved from the nineteenth-century British Newspapers Archive where we find an engraving from that report published. If we compare the image from the *Bristol Mercury* with the original which appeared in the report (Fig.6.3) it seems that the *Bristol Mercury* provided the reader with a much more puritan version

[74] Samuel Scriven, 'On the Employment of Children and Young Persons in the Mines and Collieries of the West Riding Yorkshire', in Winstanley (ed.) (1998), op. cit. Available at: http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/cms/document/1842_Yorkshire_3.pdf, p.9.

of it. The engraver attenuated the sexual features of the

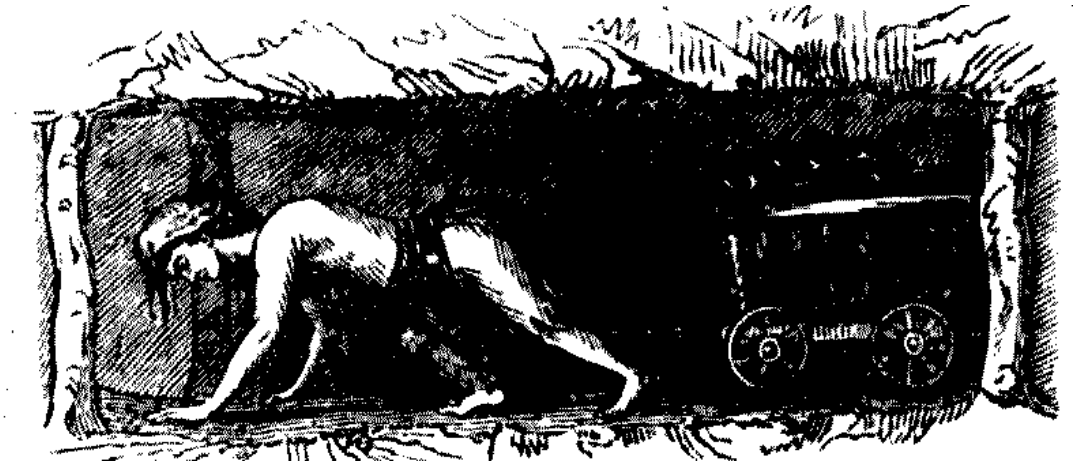

Figure 6.2 Illustration of child in mines in *Bristol Mercury*, 14 May 1842.

female miner, such as breasts and hips, making her body more masculine. The chain passing in between the legs is not visible as it is in the original. By contrast, in order to restore her femininity – the journalistic piece is about women working in the mines – the engraver extended the length of the hair, prettified her face giving her a Greek profile and put a turban on the top of her head. In the *Bristol Mercury*'s reproduction the wagon is smaller than the miner, while in the original the wagon is bigger, the miner is thinner and the tunnel looks narrower with a lower ceiling. Below is the original engraving which appeared in the Children's Employment Commission's Report.

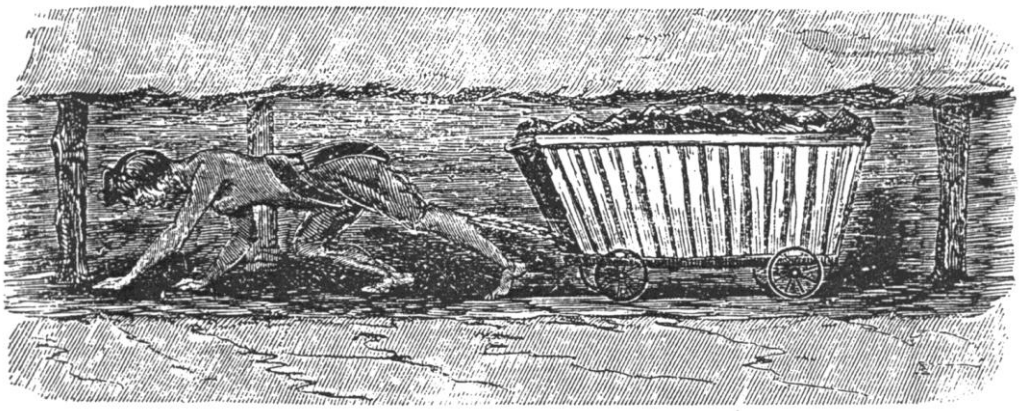

Figure 6.3 Illustration of child in mine from First Report of the Children's Employment Commission by Samuel Scriven (1842).

As stated before, *The Times*, the *ILN*, the *Guardian* and the Nineteenth-Century British Library digital archives have not returned any other image apart from the one published by the *Bristol Mercury*. This is a case where digitisation might mislead the research: the images might well have appeared more regularly in those provincial areas of the country where the coal mines were located and therefore the issue felt closer to the inhabitants of those zones. This was the case with the local conservative newspaper *Halifax Guardian*, founded in 1832. This title has not been digitized; however the piece was discovered during the digital research because some digitised newspapers reprinted extracts from it. Thus it became partially digitised as an effect of the scissor-and-paste method of Victorian journalism.[75] The *Halifax Guardian* published some of the engravings portraying half-naked children working in the mines.[76] This information was acquired by chance: in 1843 *The Times* published a story of a young miner flogged by his master; the article said the boy's sister had been one of the children portrayed in the 1842 report. The article said that her portrait had appeared in the *Halifax Guardian* one year earlier. Besides, the story of the flogged child had been extracted from the *Halifax Guardian*, as indicated at the top of the piece.[77] So we know that there was an image of a girl published in the *Halifax Guardian*, we know it was important because it rarely happened, at least in the digitised newspapers. The problem is: which illustration was it, among the many that appeared in the commissioners' 1842 report? The drawing must have been taken by the report produced by the commissioner Samuel Scriven, since he was in charge of the area of West Yorkshire, including Halifax. The report produced by Scriven

[75] This was a Victorian newsgathering practice whereby newspapers copied and recycled articles published elsewhere. For more information about this technique see Brake and Demoor (eds.) (2009), op.cit., p.561.
[76] The paper could not be consulted in hard copy as it is currently unavailable at the British Library, being in the process of being moved to Boston Spa.
[77] *The Times*, 28 February 1843, p.6.

contains many illustrations displaying children and it is difficult to assert which one could the one depicting the sister of the flogged boy.

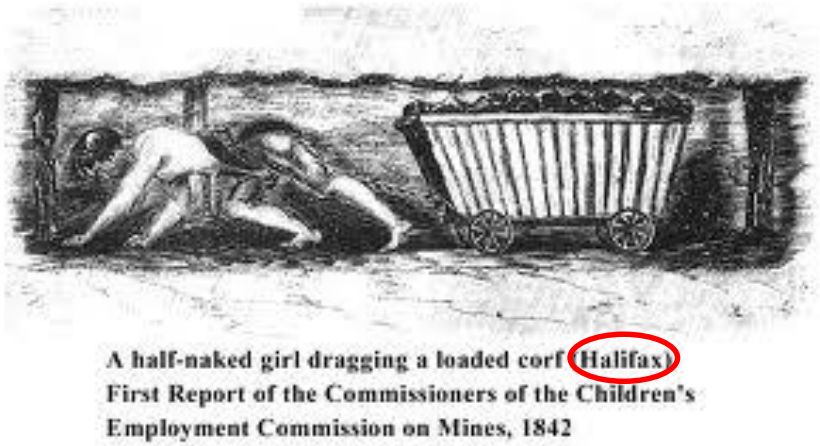

Figure 6.4 A possible reproduction of illustration in the *Halifax Guardian*. (The Esther M. Zimmer Lederberg Trust).

Figure 6.4 belongs to a personal collection of photographs, part of the Stanford University Archive of American microbiologist Esther M. Zimmer Lederberg, who put the digitised images in the public domain. If the lettering Halifax in brackets stands for *Halifax Guardian* this could be the picture used by the newspaper. Unfortunately, Lederberg, who passed away in 2006, did not use a consistent method for captions: in the list of pictures published on her website it is not always clear whether the pictures were taken from the original reports or from newspapers' cuttings. However, this is the same image, from commissioner Scriven's report, which was reproduced in its modified form by the *Bristol Mercury*. The *Halifax Guardian*, in contrast to the *Bristol Mercury*, did not modify the drawing to make it more suitable for the reader; it just reproduced the original one. Figure 6.5 represents another possible choice for the *Halifax Guardian*. This drawing, again from the highly-illustrated Scriven report, is dermatologically interesting because the woman or child portrayed seems to have a tonsure of the scalp. William Raynor Wood, one of the commissioners who inquired into the mines of Bradford and Leeds, wrote:

> The upper parts of their heads [of the miners] are always denuded of hair, their scalps thickened and inflamed, sometimes taking on the appearance of tinea capitis, from the pressure and friction which they undergo in the act of pushing the corves forward although they are mostly defended by a padded cap.[78]

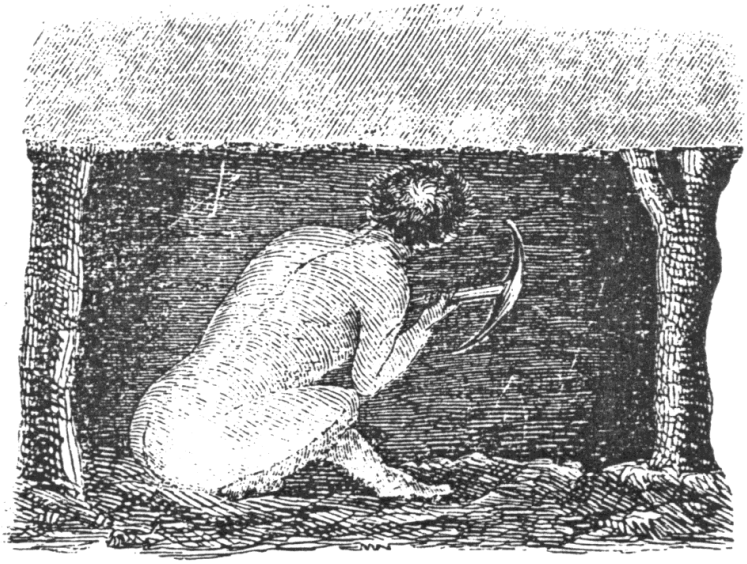

Figure 6.5 Illustration from the First Report of the Children's Employment Commission by Samuel Scriven (1842).

Figure 6.6 Reproduction of the 1842 report's lithograph in *Westminster Review* 38:1 (July 1842), p.121.

[78] William R. Wood, 'On the Employment of Young Children and Young Persons in the Mines in the Collieries and Iron Works of the towns of Bradford and Leeds', in Winstanley (ed.) (1998), op. cit. Available at: http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/cms/document/1842_Yorks_2.pdf, p.26.

The quarterly publication *Westminster Review* published a reproduction of Figure 6.5, as usual transforming the female curves into a male body, but covered the denuded scalp with a scarf and a curly-haired pony-tail (Fig. 6.6). Both images show a remarkable plasticity of the figure reminiscent of the Crouching Venus (Fig. 6.7), described in the words of Kenneth Clark as 'a symbol of fruitfulness', 'feeling earth's pull, like a hanging fruit' 'yet scarcely concealing in its structure a spring of sensual energy'.[79] It is probably because of this resemblance to a long history of representations of Venus surprised while bathing that it can be assumed that the person in the mines' report portrayed is a woman, even if we do not have a full view and the body presents a masculine musculature.

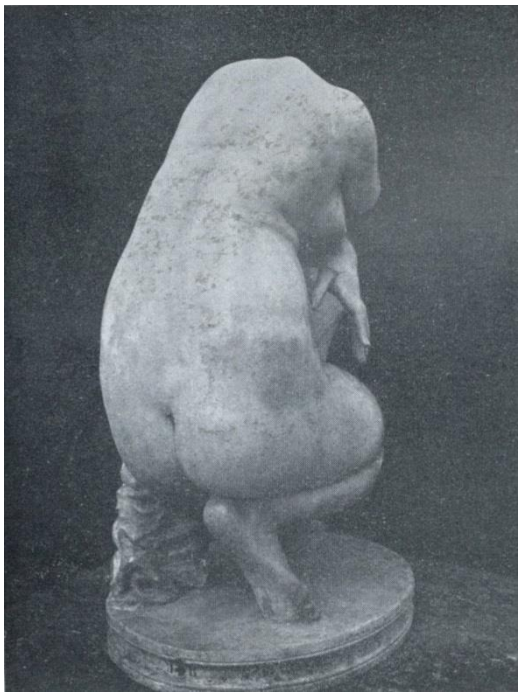

Figure 6.7 Crouching Venus Early 4th Century (Doidalsus?)

Some of those girls were interviewed and some of them remarked that they always wore trousers. The question was addressed to the problem of sexual promiscuity rather than the exposure of the naked skin to a hostile environment made up of narrow, uneven, muddy,

[79] Clark (1960), op. cit., p.336-338.

damp, and airless tunnels. That does not mean that the possible problems arising from the contact of the bare skin with that environment were not known: in fact one of the commissioners reported, in regard to health issues in the employment of children in the mines of the West Riding of Yorkshire, that:

> A naked skin in such a state, absorbs the impure air through the pores of the skin and continually breathing this kind of air affects the lungs and liver so that colliers are very much subject to asthmatical and liver complaints and with being continually wet on their feet and legs they have inflammations in those parts.[80]

After the Mines and Collieries Act

The 1842 report offered an occasion for discussing the working conditions of young miners as well as a few references to the skin problems of which the interviewees complained. The inquiry into child employment in mines led to an Act of Parliament, the Mines and Colliers Act (1842), prohibiting children under ten years old working in coal mines. The Act in particular forbade women to work in the mines. In the following years the theme of the skin in relation to mining work decreased. There are just a few examples. For instance, in a sanitary report on the working class published by *The Times* after the summer of 1842, there was a remark praising the good hygiene of the colliers, proof of which was the absence of skin disease. The article drew from a medical officer's report on a Welsh village, Merthyr Tydfil, which stated:

[80] Jelinger C. Symons, 'Report on the Employment of Children and Young Persons in the Mines and Collieries of the West Riding of Yorkshire' in Winstanley (ed.) (1998), op. cit. Available at: http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/cms/document/1842_Yorkshir__1.pdf, p.121.

> The colliers in our district invariably on their return from the pits in the evening to their houses, strip to the skin and wash themselves perfectly clean in a tub of lukewarm water, and wipe with towels until the cuticle is dry […] Generally the colliers are quite free from any cutaneous disease, or at least not so much affected with psora, &c., as the generality of their fellow workmen. Cutaneous diseases are common amongst children for want of cleanliness.[81]

The absence of reports about public individual forensic examinations of occupational accidents or deaths made it difficult to create a space in the newspapers for the dissemination of informational news about the human body, especially the skin. However, there were a few occasions when the public forensic analysis of child miners appeared in papers. It is immediately visible how the newspaper coverage of the body's examination created a forum to discuss publicly the evidence of neglect and mistreatment of a human body. For instance, in 1843 readers were horrified by a story published in the *Halifax Guardian* and reprinted nationally about a young collier boy flogged by his master. This story has been mentioned previously because the boy in question was the brother of the girl portrayed in the *Halifax Guardian*. The news, which spread across many papers including *The Times*, is an account of the misfortunes of James Whiteley, a 17 year-old apprentice who from the age of nine had been working as a miner.[82] The focus of the coverage was not on the marks of flogging, as they appeared to be old. This was a practice that, as said before, was not limited to the army but was intended as a disciplinary measure in all settings which were based on a strong hierarchical organization such as schools, the navy and some domestic environments as well. The drama emerging from the press lies in the

[81] *The Times*, 10 September 1842, p.3.
[82] It is not clear from the article if there was any degree of kinship between the two.

fact that the article highlights a wounded body sent into a wounding environment. The focus of the piece is on how the injuries caused by maltreatment made it difficult for the boy to do his job in the colliery. The article, before going to explain in detail the harsh conditions endured by the young boy, says: 'Our readers may imagine that the harrowing details which are to follow are tinged with an air of fiction. They are facts'.[83]

If we look at the article from the beginning we can see that it is divided into two parts. The first sets the scene while the second follows in depth the story of James Whiteley from the beatings, to the work in the mines, his eventual escape, an encounter with the magistrates and finally to his admittance to a workhouse. This is the sort of pattern typical in Victorian fictional narrative: it is likely that the writer was imitating fictional models like Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. The author in the article's preamble said he was about to detail things that would resemble fiction. The *Halifax Guardian* was in fact mostly devoted to publishing literature. Those details included the image of the young apprentice who lacerated the skin on his knees by falling while he was being flogged. The image is very dramatic because the small child bending on his knees calls to mind the act of penitence. As we have seen in the drawings above, miners had to walk on hands and knees within the mines, where the child was forced to work after being flogged. The most striking image is that of the child who, having managed to run away, was then brought to the magistrates by a policeman.

> His back was exhibited and presented from the nape of the neck downwards one continued series of bruises, evidently effected by some solid but thin weapon. His right hand was also dreadfully swollen in

[83] *The Times*, 28 February 1843, p.6.

> attempting to parry off the blows. One part of his body presented rather the appearance of raw, diseased meat, than of human flesh and skin![84]

One week later the paper published some more details regarding the wounds on the body of the young collier. After being examined and questioned by a surgeon, it appeared that the marks on his body were not caused by the buckle of the strap, as was previously assumed by the magistrates, but by the feet of his master.[85] By examining his back, it was also noticed that the wounds were of different colours, some being older, others recent. The boils were caused by the boy not receiving proper nourishment. In the previous article it had been said that the breaking out of boils was a consequence of brutal treatment. The inquest terminated with a fine for the master and a cancellation of the boy's indentures. Apart from bringing this story to the public eye - although there was not much follow-up as just two pieces were devoted to it - there is one single piece of important information in terms of popularization of the knowledge of skin conditions. This is when it is said that 'the boils were caused by being ill-fed'. The *Hampshire Advertiser* printed a shortened version of the story, mentioned the boils but did not connect them to the violence received. Probably this was not because of a conscious, scientifically-driven choice, but a contingency created by the necessity to cut down the words.

It is almost touching that among the disrepair of the skin of the young boy there are traces that seem to be connected to the fact that he is an adolescent. So the skin here, in addition to punishment and forced labour, tells another story which is that of a man growing up. In the light of the serious injuries received by these young boys and girls, pimples might look like a minor health issue. However, they function as a reminder that these young miners working long hours underground, apart from enduring physical and

[84] Ibid.
[85] *The Times*, 7 March 1843, p.5.

psychological pain, were denied the right to become adults, both physically and mentally. Victorian definitions of childhood were imprecise and confusing: asylum physician Thomas Clouston defined adolescence as a period from 18 to 25 with puberty starting at around 12-13.[86] There were then no age limits for working in mines so the mine could constitute the main landscape within which one passed from childhood to adulthood. In newspaper articles about miners and in the 1842 Report as well, the workers are depicted as children or adults, with nothing in between. Adolescence is neglected: there are no grey areas between childhood and adulthood and the passage from one phase to the next one is drastic, almost as if there was no space or time in the working class for an adolescence with all its rites of passage. The usual argument was that child miners were denied a childhood and forced to become adults too soon. The argument that child labour would actually prevent them from becoming adults is less common because the passage from childhood to adulthood is accompanied by a presumed loss of innocence: the same innocence represented by the unblemished face used to convey purity and cleanliness in skin products advertisements to be used for infants. In an example previously discussed a master claimed that working children were not unhappy because their minds had been rendered callous and resistant to pain. In other words children who got used to that type of work were somehow benumbed. It is precisely this atrophy of the mind's faculties that might have obstructed their mental and physical development. The presence of boils on their back is a sign of people undergoing puberty: the engravings showed very clearly that not only children but adolescents worked in the mines, with bodily forms that show sexual maturity. So the problem is not only that child labourers were denied a childhood, they were also denied an adolescence. They were working when their bodies had not fully developed. And their bodies might never develop, due to the constraints of tasks where

[86] Sally Shuttleworth, 'Victorian Childhood', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 9:1 (2010), p.109.

they were obliged to work by crawling like babies. The pimples look like an attempt of nature to take its ordinary course in unnatural conditions. What today constitutes one of the main afflictions of young people, was then just conflated with all the other signs and marks impressed on their skin.

Between 1855 and 1856 William I. Cox, a member of the Epidemiological Society, carried out research into the diseases of colliers working in Wigan. His obsevations were published by the *Lancet* where he recognized six primary causes of diseases. They were: inhalation of mechanical impurities; aspiration of noxious gases; bad ventilation; humid environment; working in uncomfortable positions for the body accompanied by injurious pressures and finally, lack of sunlight.[87] There was no mention of skin conditions, if we exclude the reference to injuries caused by persistent positions held during work. The secondary causes included: lack of personal hygiene, intemperance and lack of mental recreation. In a second article Cox mentioned cutaneous afflictions connecting their cause to a lack of personal cleanliness. Together with the pores of the skin being clogged by dust, he added privation of pure air and lack of sunlight.[88]

The final example of the way newspapers desribed miners' skin conditions is from the paper which was for most of the century, one of the least interested in exploring skin conditions, according to the keyword-based search. Reporting on a lecture about cutaneous absorption to the Academy of Sciences in Paris delivered by M. Scoutetten, the *ILN* wrote:

> All gases, even the most fetid, are absorbed by the skin […] The molecules of gas, being very minute, penetrate across the pores of the

[87] William I. Cox, 'Diseases of Special Occupations', *BMJ* 1:21 (1857), p.425.
[88] William I. Cox, 'Diseases of Special Occupations', *BMJ* 1:28 (1857), p.580.

> skin […] Liquids which pass easily into the gaseous state are promptly absorbed especially if they have the property of dissolving fats, such as ether, chloroform, benzene, glycerine, camphor…musk.[89]

The 'black spit' and the black lungs were the most expressive manifestations of the intimate connection between the body and the air that the miners breathed: this was saturated with the dust of coal that was not only breathed but also deposited on their skins.[90] It was only toward the end of the century that the first signs of improvement of the conditions of the miners started to emerge. In 1888 the *Illustrated London News* welcomed a recent Act of Parliament which regulated the management of the mines, providing better care for 'the unfortunate miners who get injured in many ways happening every day'. In one of the demonstrations that the men had to attend, a pit explosion was simulated. The miners had to demonstrate their ability to give immediate support to the injured and wounded.[91]

The 1888 Act required that the mine's masters must have bandages, splints and tourniquets readily available at all times and the miners had to attend lectures on first aid. The piece is one of the first examples of popularizing information about first aid to the injured marking the beginning of an increased public interest in occupational health. These articles in the *ILN* seems to foreshadow an improvement in the public understanding of occupational skin diseases, which were to attract greater medical attention in the following century.

Chimney sweeps' skin

[89] *ILN*, 21 July 1866, p.76.
[90] George Rosen, *The History of Miners' Diseases* (New York: Shuman's, 1943), p.138.
[91] *ILN*, 20 October 1888.

Author of *London Labour and London Poor*, Henry Mayhew, wrote: 'Chimney sweepers are a consequence of two things – chimneys and the use of coals as fuel; and these are both commodities of comparatively recent introduction'.[92] As Mayhew explained in his seminal study of London street life in 1840, chimney sweeps, or as he called them 'public cleansers', were a necessity because during the combustion of the three and a half million tons of coal consumed annually in London, a great quantity of soot deposited against the sides of chimneys had to be removed.[93] This job had previously been carried out by servants, although the figure of the chimney sweep was already around by the end of the sixteenth century. The demand for boys who were forced to climb up the inside of chimneys increased dramatically between the eighteenth and nineteenth century as a consequence of rapid urbanization. From the beginning of the nineteenth century children of four or five years old were increasingly used because they were small enough to enter the chimneys. This was a consequence of the necessity to build flues with a reduced diameter in order to save space within apartments and to prevent the heat from coal fires escaping the chimney.[94] Mayhew, in describing the profession of chimney sweeps, did not omit to list the most common health problems affecting them. They were mainly deformities, sore eyes and eyelids, asthma and burns, sores and cancer.[95] The cancer of the scrotum in chimney sweeps was recognized by Percivall Pott in the late eighteenth century. It appeared first on the lower part of the scrotum where it caused a superficial sore with hard and rising edges: from which comes the trade name 'soot

[92] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and London Poor* (1840), Vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), p.338.
[93] Ibid., p.339.
[94] George L. Phillips, 'The Abolition of Climbing Boys', *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 9:4 (1950), p.445.
[95] Mayhew (1840), op. cit., p.350.

wart'.[96] Once the wart develops it must be removed, Pott suggested. English surgeon and pathologist James Paget observed that chimney sweeps usually have scaly or encrusted small warts all over the body, therefore damage from the contact with soot would have been more extended to areas where the soot could deposit: in between toes, in the groin, lower lip and face.[97] As a preventive measure the *Lancet* suggested that chimney sweeps should bathe daily and wear appropriate clothing, following the example of North German and Swiss sweeps where the occurrence of this form of cancer was minor. Professor of Pathology and Surgeon Henry Butlin, who usd to deliver lectures at the Royal College of Surgeons, argued that those preventive measure were not adopted in Britain because of prejudice, and ignorance and hostility towards innovation.[98]

Articles about the carcinoma affecting the skin of the scrotum appeared rarely in newspapers despite Britain recording the highest number of occurrences of this cancer in Europe.[99] According to Mayhew, Parliament did not start to pay attention to the conditions of the climbing boys until 1770. It was then that journalist Jonas Hanway launched an investigation into the conditions of sweeps' apprentices. His findings regarding the neglect of chimney sweeps were published in the London newspaper *Public Advertiser* in a series of letters calling attention to the barbarous treatment of climbing boys.[100] In 1824 journalist and campaigner James Montgomery wrote *The Chimney Sweeper's Friend and Climbing Boy's Album*. The publication,

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[96] Percival Pott, *Chirurgical Observations Relative to the Cataract, the Polypus of the Nose, the Cancer of the Scrotum, the Different Kinds of Ruptures, and the Mortification of the Toes and Feet* (London: T. J. Carnegy, 1775), p.64.
[97] Henry Butlin, 'Three Lectures on Cancer of the Scrotum in Chimney-Sweeps and Others', *BMJ* 2:1644 (1892), p.1.
[98] Ibid., p.6.
[99] Henry, T. Butlin, 'Three Lectures on Cancer of the Scrotum in Chimney-Sweeps and Others', *BMJ* 1:1643 (1892), p.1341.
[100] Kathleen Strange, *Climbing Boys* (London: Allison & Busby, 1982), p.39.

which is an example of literary activism, was probably addressed to the wealthier classes and constituted an account in prose and verse of the miserable working condition of children employed as chimney sweeps.

In terms of legislation, if the Mines and Collieries Act 1842 marked the beginning of a series of actions to regulate the conditions of employment in British mines, the 1840 Act for Regulation of Chimney Sweeps and Chimneys, which became operative in 1842, constitutes the first attempt to regulate the use of children as chimney sweeps. The Act forbade the employment of persons under twenty one years as climbing sweepers and outlawed masters who had apprentices under sixteen years. Anthony Ashley-Cooper was once again behind the change, but apparently this act only existed on paper. In reality it did not improve conditions for apprenticeship and the masters continued to employ children under the prescribed age.[101] The stories which appeared in newspapers bear witness to the fact that the Act was largely unobserved. The format of the articles on inquests into accidents involving chimney sweeps followed a structure that shows similarities to literary models. The narrative was structured around key points such as the relationship between master and apprentice, which usually involved ill-treatment; the type of tasks carried out by the child; the incident, usually followed by death of the child by suffocation, fall or burns; the 'surprise' of the master and people witnessing the event and the aftermath; and the trial, with the body of the victim at the centre of the discussion. The observation of the laceration of the skin provided the legal evidence for the resolution of the inquest and a narrative theme for the reporters.

[101] Ibid., p.78.

In 1840 the Tory newspaper *Manchester Chronicle* published the story, reprinted by the *Morning Post,* of a ten-year-old chimney sweep the examination of whose wounds revealed a cruel death, caused either by suffocation or burns generated while he was in one of the flues connected with the boiler of the steam-engine at a Manchester factory. The description of the child's body circulated in several papers as well as in the *Morning Post,* in the *Standard* and in *The Times*. The reporters stated that the body presented a 'most melancholy spectacle': both sides of the child's face were bruised, the skin totally burnt off and there were several injuries to the body.[102] The presence of a coroner and the body's examination played a central role in the news coverage, as with cases of flogging in the army and inquests into neglect in workhouses. In 1847 the *Manchester Guardian* reported a case of mistreatment of a young climbing boy. The surgeon who performed the examination found many blisters caused by heat. But what he noticed in particular was the presence of stripes on the back. When the surgeon removed the skin from the back he found 'a great number of extravasions of blood in continuous lines' and he reached the conclusion that they could have only been caused by external violence such as blows from a stick. Therefore, the death of the child revealed a history of violence in addition to his illegal employment. The convulsion caused by suffocation might have been the cause of death but the surgeon was unsure. Similarly to the story published in 1840 and to many others both before and after, it was hard to establish whether the cause of death was suffocation or burns. In this case, the jury returned a verdict of manslaughter against the sweep's master.[103]

[102]*Morning Post*, 3 December 1840.
[103] *Manchester Guardian*, 17 July 1847, p.9.

It seems that the stories tended to attract greater news coverage when they involved acts of violence against the children. This is also because the story was easier to tell as the writer could structure it as a manichean struggle between good (child) and evil (master). On the other hand, if the young boys died from the consequence of an accident at work, this was perceived more as a known risk of the trade. But if the death was caused or accelerated by the child being subject to corporal punishment then the episode attracted greater attention. The pattern of this episode is similar to the case of a young miner from Bradford whose story was discussed in chapter five with a focus on his 'skin and bone appearance'.[104] The boy was recruited to work as a hurrier, a coal drawer, in the coal pits of Wilsden; an illegitimate child, an orphan, he used to be beaten by his master in the pit. One day he managed to escape but he was eventually found in a wood by a man whose credentials were not given and then brought to a doctor. By examining his back the doctor, called Thomas Mackley, found various old wounds on the spine and fresh wounds on the buttocks. The appearance of the spine was 'more curved than it is in a natural state'.[105] In both cases the marks on the back's skin provided evidence of both ill treatment and the physical effort produced by the working conditions.

As *The Times* wrote in one of its editorials about the problem of child employment, if English people look into a coal scuttle there is a story in it. The piece was produced after a talk by the aforementioned Victorian social reformer, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Shaftesbury, in the House of Lords in 1864. More than twenty years after the release of the Report on children working in mines, the fight for prioritising education over work still went on. On this occasion Cooper was committed to banning the employment of children as chimney sweeps. In fact he proposed a bill to amend the 1840 Chimney

[104] See p.163.
[105] *The Times*, 16 May 1848, p.8.

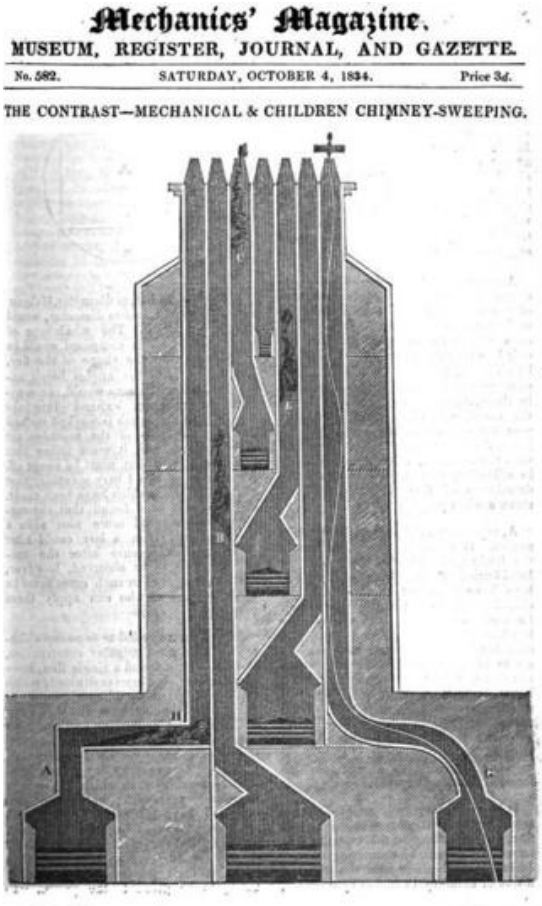
Sweepers and Chimneys Regulations Act. The 1864 Chimney Sweeps Regulation Act banned employment of sweeps under 16 years. *The Times* explained in the editorial that men are made by nature to climb. However, climbing boys do not follow a law of nature but rather a 'Law of suffering'. 'He is said to climb, but what he does is the very converse of ordinary climbing. He is that "angular" man that humorists talk of, always giving and receiving wounds'.[106] *The Times* then adds that, still according to the law of nature, the reason why humans are able to grasp the stem of a tree with their limbs and grasp the branches with the fingers is because their extremities are soft. It is precisely because the skin of the hands and feet is soft that these operations are possible: 'It is the soft and muscular palm of the hand and the inside of the finger, the soft ball of the toe, the soft front of the whole frame that bears the brunt of this operation'.[107] This quality of softness of the skin recalls the hardnesses and callosity of the skin of the miners. *The Times'* editorial reminds the reader once again that it is a bad sign when some areas of the skin become hard from over-work: it does not facilitate dexterity because one loses sensitivity in the hands. Master sweeps used to rub the chimney sweeps' skin with brine in order to harden it and make them more efficient. A master-sweep of Nottingham, in a note to the Children's Employment Commission in 1863, said:

> The flesh must be hardened. This is done by rubbing it, chiefly on the elbows and knees with the strongest brine […] At first they will come back from their work with their arms and knees streaming with blood, and the knees looking as the caps had been pulled off. Then they must be rubbed with brine again, and perhaps go off at once to another chimney. In some boys I have found that the skin does not harden for years.[108]

[106] *The Times*, 4 June 1864, p.11.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Strange (1982), op. cit., p.14.

The Times structured its argument against the employment of children around the theme of what nature made people for. In fact, what was immediately noted in the *post-mortem* examinations of young workers was the unnatural curve of the spine. This was a sign of work 'against nature'. Then there is the leitmotif of the callous and hardened skin, presented by chimney masters or pit owners as a necessity of the work. The idea that the callous skin would facilitate work, in reality, as *The Times* explains, goes against the law of nature, inwhich extremities are intended to be soft precisely to facilitate grasping and handling things. *The Times* editorial then adds a note about the malignant tumour affecting the trade: 'He [the child] is lacerated at every joint; every pore of his skin is choked with solid dirt; he becomes liable to a special curse in the form of a dangerous cancer'. The dangerous cancer the article is talking about is the cancer of the scrotum which, however, did not tend to affect children.[109] In 1865 Lord Shaftesbury brought the issue of child employment back to Parliament in describing the system of child emploment in chimneys and comparing the House of Lords to The Chamber of Horrors for their neglect of the problem (with evident reference to the Wax museum of Madam Tussaud). This time in his arguments he included a few more sanitary details, mentioning the cancer of the scrotum as one of the main problems affecting chimney sweeps.[110]

[109] Butlin (1892), op. cit., p.2.
[110] *The Times*, 12 May 1875, p.8.



Mechanics' Magazine.

MUSEUM, REGISTER, JOURNAL, AND GAZETTE.

No. 582. SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1834. Price 3d.

THE CONTRAST—MECHANICAL & CHILDREN CHIMNEY-SWEEPING.

Figure 6.8 The so called 'angular men'. Front page of the *Mechanics' Magazine* showing how climbing boys operated, 4 October 1834.

The attention of the press to chimney sweeps may be explained by the fact that they were a fruitful literary subject, rather than by any interest in the diseases of the trade. The first examples are two poems by William Blake from which James Montgomery drew extensively in his anthology on child chimney sweeps. In *The Chimney Sweeper* a child chimney sweep recounts his dream where he sees thousands of dead sweeps being set free from their coffins by an angel. The angel brings them to a meadow near a river where the chimney sweeps can wash. The image of a chimney sweep who, after death, enters a dimension that sets him free from his previous condition is symbolized by the contact with water which washes the blackness away. The child, in order to ascend to the afterlife, must be free of dirt.

A note on the business of young chimney sweeps appeared also in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. When the workhouse where Oliver was staying advertises an orphan available as an apprentice together with five pounds for whoever takes him on, a chimney sweep called Mr. Gamfield tries to get him in order to have the money to pay his rent. Mr. Gamfield appears immediately as a cruel man, a detail denoted by how he beats the donkey that accompanies him.The master in fact appears to be notorious for allegedly having caused the deaths of two or three boys under his apprenticeship. In the end the chairman of the workhouse board agrees to give him the boy and three pounds only. However, at the very last moment a magistrate who had to sign paperwork for the negotiation refuses to send Oliver to work as an apprentice with Gamfield. When Mr Gamfield 'with a partially washed face' is conducted to the magistrates to finalise the indentures, the fate of Oliver changes. The half-blind magistrate happened to notice the pallor and terror in Oliver's face in contrast to the 'repulsive countenance of his future master'.[111] Therefore Oliver Twist's adventures won't revolve around the world of chimney sweeps, as happens in the most emblematic literary example of this topic of the time: Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*. This novel was serialised in the periodical *Macmillan's Magazine* between 1862 and 1863. It recounts the story of Tom, a child chimney sweep who during his work falls into a river and drowns. He is then transformed into an aquatic creature and begins to have encounters that will teach him a lesson, which will lead to his moral redemption. This moral redemption was exemplified by the change of his skin, which first of all had to be cleansed. The change in Tom's skin, the dirtiness of which is washed away by the water, seems the preliminary condition for him to

[111] Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (New York: Bantam Classic, 2005), p.22.

change morally.[112] This reminds one of the centrality of clean skin in moral discourse in the Victorian period.

The chimney sweep was a typical character in Pears' soap advertising campaigns. The blackened face of the sweep was used as an example of a lack of use of Pears' soap (Fig. 6.9). This advert could be read as an example of imperial advertising where the black skin is synonymous with a specific group identity that could not be accepted unless washed or whitened. It does not really matter where the blackness comes from, whether it is from dirt or it is just the skin's pigmentation, the soap advert message is unequivocal: one must use soap because soap symbolizes the birth of civilization, as another Pears' Soap advertisement suggested.[113] The soap then seems to be an instrument of control. Soap preserved class boundaries, gender and race identity, trying to maintain a social order which was under threat from the slum's effluvia, the smoke of industry, imperial competition and anticolonial resistance.[114] The black skin of the chimney sweep might be a temporary feature: the soot can be washed away. The channel of water less than one step behind him might symbolize this eventuality, which the advert suggests may be possible with the use of an instrument: the soap. This could change his social status. In the engraving we can see a clear demarcation between the sweep and the little girl. The woman holding the brush so as to keep him away creates a further obstacle. Curiously the little girl seems to be a little worker herself so their conditions do not appear to be so different,

[112] To these narrative instances must be added that theatrical melodramas produced between the 1820s and 1830s contributed to the social debate about the employment of chimney sweeps. These plays, representing a popular response to the changes in working life, included *The Climbing Boy* or *The Little Sweep* by Richard Brinsley, which sees as a protagonist a young boy separated by fate from his wealthy parents and forced to work as a chimney sweep.

[113] *Graphic*, 28 November 1885.
[114] McClintock (1995), op. cit., p.211.

apart from the fact that she has her hands soaked in water and he has his in the soot. In the fantastic literary dimension of Kingsley's novel the encounter between the child and the young girl becomes possible after he undergoes the ritual of being washed: this obstacle is insuperable without the skin's transformation.

Figure 6.9 Pears' Soap Advertisement in *ILN*, 31 May 1890.

Despite the popularity of sweeps, Victorian newspapers, apart from the few examples proposed, did not pay much attention to dermatological issues. Two trends were confirmed: the efficacy of the forensic examination of the wounds on a body to denounce atrocities against children and the use of black skin as a signifier for the working class, whose immorality and lack of civilization was connected to the lack of hygiene.

Conclusion

If the injured skin of soldiers symbolized the injustices in the army and if the bed-sores of workhouse inmates were a reminder of the faults of the New Poor Law, occupational diseases, such as those occurring in factories, mines or chimneys, were a drawback of a new industrial system that developed between the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As regards the issue of corporal punishment and neglect of the poor, newspapers framed the news by highlighting a dualistic opposition between the good and the bad. Unless the stories regarding the skin of Victorian workers did involve direct corporal punishment, there was not such a clear definition of cause and consequence. Blaming the industrial system as the source of the health problems of the working class would have meant bringing everything that thrived under that system, including newspapers, into question.

Overall, skin diseases affecting the working class did not obtain much coverage from Victorian newspapers. The first motivation must be found in the medical profession itself, which did not start to explore the topic in depth until the beginning of the twentieth century. The neglect of the doctors corresponded with the neglect of journalists who tended to follow the doctors' lead in matters of health and medicine.

A second reason why newspapers did not talk extensively about the wounds of miners and sweeps is that the legal system did not protect them; trials were unusual if a worker got injured or died and there were not many newspapers' reports giving the results of *post-mortem* examinations. The publication of the 1842 Commissioner's Report of Children's Employment directed attention to the health

problems of the working class by highlighting two issues which created public uproar: the young age of people employed and the presence of naked or half-naked women in mines with men. Children and promiscuity gave the newspapers two arguments that would have attracted readers' attention because they were able to create, in the words of the *Northern Star*, 'painful interest'.[115] The bare skin of children working in mines became the symbol, in both the words of the children interviewed by the commissioners and in the lithographs, of the children's exposure to a dangerous environment. However, the problem of nakedness tended to divert attention to moral issues instead of inducing consideration of the health conditions of the miners. Nudity drew attention to sexuality: the friction of the bare skin against uneven walls and stones became a secondary problem. Nonetheless, changes in the law were made: in fact one of the immediate consequences of the Children's Employment Report was to outlaw the presence of women and children under ten years old in mines.

Analysing the news coverage of the skin of the working class, in particular its occupational skin diseases, highlighted a limit of the digital archives. A large part of mining coverage could not be retrieved from the digital archives. It might be the case that working class issues were discussed more often in provincial papers as the mines were located in remote villages. Having said that, even if papers closer to mining communities did devote more attention to the mines, this does not necessarily mean that their health was discussed in greater detail. This is because, as noted before, the primary cause of a lack of news coverage was a lack of medical interest. Occupational health lectures or medical intervention in newspapers on occupational

[115] See p.224.

skin diseases were rare. Moreover, when newspapers wanted to cover mining accidents they did look at local papers and reprinted from them, as was the case of the *Halifax Guardian,* so some material is partially recovered even if not digitized. The *Northern Star* for example did stress the conditions of the working class, systematically reporting Chartist meetings about the conditions of children in mines, but it did not address occupational health.

As for miners, the news coverage of chimney sweeps focused on children, prompting the regulation of their working conditions through the bills proposed by the charismatic figure of Lord Shaftesbury. These bills became law: the Chimney Sweepers and Chimneys Regulation Act (1840) banned the employment of climbing boys under twenty-one years old, but this was ignored by master sweeps. Subsequently came the Chimney Sweepers Regulation Act (1864) and the Chimney Sweepers Act (1865) that amended the act of 1840 in order to prevent child employment. So political action followed the 1840s inquests, but what was lacking was systematic support for the medical argument against harsh working conditions for both adults and children. The tale was always the same: hard work protects the skin by hardening it and making it immune. The truth is that the children were forced to work in conditions hostile to the aims the human body is structured for. Miners were forced to work curled up underground; chimney sweeps were forced to work curled up suspended in the air.

Considering the attention given by *The Times* to the skin of soldiers and workhouse inmates, it is interesting to notice that its coverage of both cases involving miners and chimney sweeps did not develop the dermatological side of the issues. This might be because, in addition to a lack of occupational health medicine,

the readers would have not wanted to know the price of the industrial revolution. As a consequence of their lack of in-depth coverage of occupational skin diseases the newspapers failed in two things where, in contrast, they had been successful for the sanitation movement, the anti-flogging campaign and the anti-Poor Law movement. The articles discussed in this chapter constitute isolated examples rather than a systematic (however brief) coverage of skin-related issues. Firstly, by not mentioning the skin the reportage does not allow the reader to understand the cause of the pain of the people whose stories were discussed. In addition, by not discussing in depth the risks and dangers of the different trades, the newspapers missed the opportunity to provide advice about preventive measures which might have averted accidents or diseases: for instance, self-help tips like those which were disseminated in relation to the management of bed-sores.

Concluding Remarks

This study set out to explore the newspaper portrayal of a science-related topic in the Victorian period with a focus on the years 1840-1900. The main assumption was that looking at the news coverage of skin would provide a new understanding of the Victorian newspaper, thus adding a new chapter to the history of the nineteenth-century press in Britain. This thesis linked two phenomena connected to the expansion of the press: the development of journalism and the development of a new medical speciality, dermatology. In order to individualize the areas of intersection between these two fields a keyword search was utilized across multiple digital archives. The analysis of the retrieved articles demonstrated that talking about the skin in newspapers not only provided the basis for a more rounded appreciation of human anatomy but also a greater understanding of the relationship between the skin of people and the external environment, as well as how the external environment, which was the rapidly urbanizing industrial Victorian reality, reflected on skin.

Tracking the dissemination of news about skin, it was found that the skin was a malleable topic used for different purposes, mainly commercial, political and epistemological. The digital research provided quantitative and qualitative information. These data are complementary but provided different responses to the question of how the skin was portrayed in Victorian newspapers. From a quantitative point of view the skin appeared, as one might expect, mostly in the advertising and classified sections of newspapers. Advertisements were not only the main form of revenue for newspapers but also the first place where a reader might encounter the word skin, as advertisements were usually placed on the front page. In fact the depiction of skin in advertisements constitutes

part of the first findings chapter of this thesis. Skin products such as soap and creams were highly advertised commodities, framed within the semantics of the civilizing and cleansing Victorian missions. Cosmetics promised an ideal of beauty conveyed through a clear, unblemished and perfect complexion, as we have seen in the popular Cuticura advertisement, portraying an unblemished, angel-like face (Fig. 3.2). This is because any skin diseases or disorders, such as eruptions or boils, were considered an indicator of flaws in the temperament of an individual. As English beauty writer Arnold Cooley used to say: a pleasing appearance is the first letter of recommendation. The title 'The Ethics of the Skin', a piece published across newspapers such as the *Standard*, the *Birmingham Daily Post*, and the *Bury and Norwich Post*, confirmed that the care of the skin was not only an aesthetic problem but an ethical one, involving personal choices and revealing the adherence or lack of adherence to moral principles.

The same adverts were published in different types of newspapers, local and national; the only difference being whether or not they featured illustrations. Some pictorial publications such as the *Preston Guardian* and the *Illustrated London News* did, whilst others, such as *The Times*, did not. The two main ideas accompanying the depiction of skin in advertisements were that the skin is a superficial, single-layered organ and that the skin is an organ which communicates with the inside of the body, though this communication tended to be represented more in a figurative rather than anatomical way. A presentation of skin as a superficial layer fitted the purpose of selling cosmetics for external application, or selling skin products which claimed to cure diseases such as acne or even leprosy and syphilis by deleting the skin's marks with soap or creams - almost as if the disease was delimited by the mark. One the other hand, the advertisements pivoted around the idea that skin permits the outside to communicate with the inside. The nature of this communication, between outside and inside, was highlighted through a metaphorical

rather than an anatomical explanation. The skin was seen to convey information not about the inner organs but about character. ‘What can my inside have to do with my complexion?’ asked a woman of the *Penny Illustrated Paper*’s ladies’ column, keen to improve the quality of her skin. ‘Well’, as Arnold Cooley said, eruptions on the forehead can be a sign of some sort of vice, ‘a mark of the violation of laws’. Such attitudes explain why pimples or any other type of skin disorder were considered humiliating, disfiguring and something to be ashamed of, as we have seen in several examples published in the *Graphic* newspaper (Figs. 3.6 and 3.7).

The option ‘keyword’ whereby the software retrieves articles where the term ‘skin’ appeared in the headline or was repeated consistently across the piece allowed the collection of articles relating to socio-political campaigns - the second reason why newspapers mentioned skin in their reports. They used the topic to reinforce ongoing social campaigns. The first social campaign identified, through the option ‘keyword’, was the sanitation movement. The discussion of the way the newspapers used the skin to shape the arguments of the sanitation mission was included in chapter three together with the analysis of advertisements. This is because the two types of content, advertisements for soaps and the news coverage of the sanitation movement, showed similarities. They displayed both a highly normative and repetitive language, conveying mainly the message that the skin was an indicator of cleanliness, morality and as a consequence of these, good health as well. Information about the care of skin, in articles, editorials and letters, was conveyed mainly through news about public baths openings, extolling the benefits of washing, and publication of lectures about skin care and the relationship between skin care and use of soap and water. Although there were some attempts to explain the multi-layered structure of the skin, for example through the published lectures of physicians such as Alfred Neale or Malcom Morris challenging the idea of skin as merely a superficial layer,

the skin remained a symbolic surface to be kept clean to protect against all sort of physical ailments. A typical case was the portrayal of skin cleanliness in relation to cholera. This example showed how the care of skin had been overemphasized, presenting it as a panacea for all diseases including cholera, which is an infectious disease of the digestive apparatus. What was over-emphasized in this case was the skin's porosity as an indicator of the dangerous permeability of skin – the implication being that anything could get in. In reality, the key to understanding the relationship between skin and inner organs was revealed not by skin pores, which mainly perform respiratory functions such as sweating, but by extensive reports drawn up during autopsies and then published in newspapers.

By deselecting the 'keyword' option and looking at the word 'skin' in all articles, selecting the option 'entire document' allowed the collection of those results whose in-depth analysis revealed another story about skin. As explained in the methodology, the software permits the researcher to narrow the search options by looking at a word only when it occurs in titles or when it is the central topic of an article. For example, if you tick the option 'keyword', you will mainly obtain items that deal directly with skin; advertisements, public health columns, medical lectures. But if the researcher keeps the options free then articles will be retrieved where the skin, although not centre stage, plays a crucial role from a marginal position. An example was the analysis of the cutaneous layer in *post-mortem* examinations in order to find legal evidence in cases of abuse or neglect. In those cases the word 'skin' might appear only once, but the medical analysis is a key to understanding the significant political weight of the story covered. The analysis of this type of result showed that, although most newspapers were interested in talking about skin, it was in *The Times* in particular that the socio-political purpose of a newspaper using human skin to support a social campaign emerged more strikingly.

Exploring the news coverage of skin in *The Times* newspaper showed that the skin was used as a means to foster two social campaigns of that time: the campaign to abolish flogging in the military, and the movement against the New Poor Law and against its most symbolic manifestation: the workhouse. The case studies discussed in chapters four and five disclosed stories where attention no longer focused on the skin as an intact surface but on wounds to the skin, the observation of which would reveal its multi-layered structure. The public discussion of the in-depth structure of the skin was stimulated thanks to the multiple actions of different agents emerging from *The Times'* coverage. The agents were: a medical coroner, an office which was established only in the 1840s, in the person of Thomas Wakley; the proceedings of the inquests which were reported *verbatim* by *The Times'* reporters; the intervention of medical people such as surgeons or physicians in the newspaper columns to comment through letters or published lectures on the topic of the day, for example Erasmus Wilson; editorials of the newspaper itself and letters from readers, either professionally knowledgeable or just interested in the subject. These agents pivoted round the results of the *post-mortem* examination performed on the bodies of, specifically, a soldier flogged at Hounslow in 1846, John White, and on patients who died from the complications of bed-sores between the 1840s and the 1860s in workhouses: William Holding, Timothy Daly and Richard Gibson. In these case studies the news coverage of skin revealed a collision of many different interests in the newspaper's pages.

In the case of the soldier flogged at Hounslow, John White, there was the military insisting that there was no connection between the blows on the soldier's back and his death. There was the medical coroner, social reformer and journalist Thomas Wakley, who instead suggested the existence of a connection between the two events: flogging and death. There were three forensic examinations where the wounds and internal organs of the soldier were analysed and explained throughout the inquest. There was a well-known

surgeon, Erasmus Wilson, specializing in dermatology, who was already serving the sanitarian mission lending his expertise to help spread awareness of skin cleanliness, but this time involved in something more complex. The challenge was to question the idea put forward by the military, and also deep-rooted in the cultural tradition, of the skin as an impenetrable barrier, a shield for the human body. The two medical people also had an interest in promoting the utility of the forensic examination against prejudices towards the practice, mostly dictated by folklore and religious beliefs. The last agent was the newspaper itself that was not only participating in the social campaign against flogging but was also promoting cases of public interest such as the living conditions of the poor and of soldiers. In this case study there was a perfect agreement between the quantitative-orientated Gale Cengage software tools and the critical approach, because by identifying how many times the word skin was used in the year of the inquest, 1846, it was possible to see that it was *The Times* newspaper especially which insisted on the centrality of the skin in understanding the cruelty of flogging.

In contrast to *The Times'* coverage of the inquest into flogging in the army, the inquests into deaths in workhouses were retrieved by replacing the word 'skin' with a specific type of wound, the *decubitus ulcer,* or in its popular usage: bed-sore. The newspaper again demonstrated its role as promoter of social campaigns through editorials as well as through the extensive news coverage of three inquests into deaths allegedly caused by the neglect of bed-sores. This time the New Poor Law workhouses came under attack: they had been presented as a solution to the problem of poverty and instead became 'the antechambers of the grave', in the words of Thomas Wakley.[1] In these cases the agents, with their conflicting interests, were the coronership, the New Poor Law

[1] Thomas Wakley, in the *Lancet* 36:922 (1841), p.194.

Commission, the workhouse management and the newspaper as a forum for debate and as an active participant in the discussion. In one of the inquests analysed, that of William Holding, the coroner was again Thomas Wakley, who was committed to demonstrating the necessity of a medical presence during trials. However, in the following case studies, Timothy Daly and Richard Gibson, both in 1865, the Poor Law Commission became a main agent. The person in charge of these inquests was in fact Poor Law inspector Harry Farnall. In this case *The Times* did not benefit from the guidance and the able rhetoric of Wakley, who died in 1862. Investigative journalism had not yet developed and the cases lacked two strong personalities with an investigative attitude who had appeared together in 1846: Thomas Wakley and Erasmus Wilson. These inquests demonstrated that wounds needed people to explain them. News reports needed journalists, not just to report, but to interpret and mediate the content of the topic heard in the courtroom. However, *The Times*, together with other Victorian newspapers, continued discussing in depth what bed-sores were and how they could be prevented, thus furnishing the reader with useful information about daily skin care for people unable to move.

The main difference between framing skin in advertisements and in the sanitation movement and framing it within a juridical inquest is that, while in the former the skin was always generic - it was everybody's skin - in the inquests the skin always had a name and surname. It is identification with the person to whom that skin belongs that might have enabled the reader to feel sympathy for the subject under discussion. This sympathy became an instrument for supporting either a campaign against corporal punishment or a campaign against neglect of the poor. A further difference is that in the intersecting effects of commercials and sanitization motifs the skin was presented as a proof of cleanliness, of beauty and ultimately of one's moral conduct. In contrast, in the inquests on people mistreated or neglected the skin was presented as a legal evidence. This evidence did not

reflect the behaviour of the person bearing the marks but that of someone else who injured that skin. These different approaches to reading an individual's skin, skin as symbol of beauty and good and skin as legal evidence, lead to the third purpose for which newspapers published skin-related stories. This is an epistemological purpose.

The popularization of the knowledge of skin could be marshalled through different means within a newspaper. Information about skin was embedded in advertisements that often employed well-known surgeons to sustain the promotion of a product. In those cases the information was manipulated for selling purposes, it was mainly superficial and relied on generalizations such as a claim for the existence of a specific drug which would cure any skin ailments. This does not mean that some adverts might not have contained useful information but the commercially-oriented objective makes it less reliable. The main form of popularization of knowledge of skin was the reports of *post-mortem* examinations where the actual wounds were discussed, together with what or who might have caused them. The greatest contribution of the newspaper did not lie in explaining dermatology to lay readers. Delivering accurate information on health in newspapers was complicated by the fact that, during the time in which the case studies are located, medical research still lacked understanding of key reasons for the fatality of certain wounds, such as septicaemia. The contribution of the Victorian newspaper, especially *The Times*, was to disseminate a more complex and critical understanding of the function and characteristics of the skin in its vertical structure and its relationship with the body's other parts.

As we have seen the skin was an organ that could tell many stories but sometimes it told stories the readers might have been less willing to know about. The final findings chapter of this thesis, on occupational skin diseases, is diametrically opposed to the first

findings chapter. The chapter exploring skin in advertisements and sanitation campaigns is a direct product of the keyword-based search. This enabled the researcher to explore the theme of 'skin' through the presence of the word 'skin' in the articles retrieved. The chapter about occupational skin diseases, namely those of miners and chimney sweeps, explored the theme of skin in the absence of the relative term. The final chapter confirmed what was stated in the methodology, that the keyword search tool for researching digital archives must be used in a critical way. The reason that occupational skin diseases did not receive great attention from newspapers is most probably linked to the fact that research in occupational medicine did not develop completely in the nineteenth century. This would also explain why working-class newspapers, such as the *Northern Star*, that one would have imagined being interested in the skin diseases of workers, did not frame the news using the skin as an argument in defence of the working class. Especially in the case of miners, their deaths were seldom framed within the arguments arising from forensic analysis, because most of the time there was no trial, and therefore the journalists lacked that important legal-medical source that enabled discussion of the structure of skin and what lay underneath. It has also been speculated in this thesis that discussing the occupational wounds of the working class might have meant drawing attention to the industrial economy, from which the newspaper certainly benefited via enhanced communication and printing technologies. It might have seemed easier to build a story creating a contrast between an unjust and cruel official military sergeant and the simple soldier, or the contrast between a drunken nurse and a bed-ridden patient. To some extent the papers managed to re-create this dualism in stories about young chimney sweeps or miners and their cruel masters, but the skin was seldom discussed in depth. Consequently, the reporting missed the epistemological element in covering the skin, which was present in the other stories discussed in the previous chapters.

Chronologically speaking the results have shown that the key years for the discussion of skin as an argument for sustaining social campaigns clustered in the 1840s. That was a decade marked by Sanitary Reform, with the publication of Edwin Chadwick's *Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* (1842); the *Commissioners' Report of Child Employment* (1842); the Chartist national working class movement; and the political upheavals taking place across Europe in 1848. As for the medical side, while dermatological treatises appeared much earlier, popular books about skin care were published during the 1840s. One of the most famous was Erasmus Wilson's *Practical and Theoretical Treatise on Diseases of the Skin* (1842). The skin then became a potent signifier of the increasing mass of people who were neglected by a society that had always privileged a select few. If we look at the last two decades of the century the message was still, under the false pretence of a sanitation movement, that the care of the skin is a habit for civilized people and the beauty that would result from this care would guarantee that the individual would be accepted in society. The newspaper portrayal of skin showed that during the nineteenth century there was not a progressive idea of the skin. This is because the idea of skin as a multi-layered organ never completely replaced the idea of skin as a single layer. A superficial approach to the skin and an in-depth one coexisted in the different sections of the same newspaper for different purposes. The two perceptions were not mutually exclusive and still are not today: the skin is still rarely perceived in the popular imagination as an organ, the largest of the human body.

This thesis also states that the news coverage of skin during the 1840s shows aspects of journalism usually ascribed emphatically to the end of the century, such as sensationalism and the investigative role of the newspaper. On the other hand the findings corroborate the pre-1880s journalism being more educative.

The distinction between old journalism, (educational) and new journalism, (representative), in practice is problematic: according to which criteria can content be said to be educative, sensational and informative? For example, are verbatim proceedings that were gradually reduced during the era of New Journalism objective enough? A search using the keyword skin demonstrated that divisions between old and new journalism were not that categorical because the type of content might have influenced the mode of reporting regardless of the fact that journalism as a profession developed later on.

Whereas investigative journalism developed properly at the end of the century, science journalism might have lost some of the characteristics that this thesis demonstrated were crucial for presenting an understanding of the skin. These were: the verbatim report of post-mortem examinations, the presence of an investigative coroner replacing the anonymous journalist, and the general climate of reform and revolutions of the 1840s. William T. Stead wrote, in the *Contemporary Review* in 1886, that in journalism "everything depends upon the individual. Impersonal journalism is effete".[2] The newspapers of the 1840s were far from being impersonal, despite the lack of a professional journalist signing the articles that appeared in print. Personality was expressed through the stream of letters arriving from surgeons and physicians and readers who did not state their profession.

Victorian newspapers are valuable ephemera because between parliamentary reports, market or crime news, advertisements, poems, drawings and fiction, there was space for talking about the skin in its physiological and pathological characteristics as well as its role in what it means to suffer as a human being. Remembering this value, in old

[2] William T. Stead, 'The Future of Journalism', *The Contemporary Review*, 50, (1886).

newspapers brought back to life through digital archives, might help us to reconsider the value of the contemporary newspaper in providing the reader with a kaleidoscopic representation of reality. This applies in particular to the body, both as an object and as the human being that inhabits that body.

The use of digital archives interrogated through a keyword-based search constitutes one of the greatest methodological novelties in current research on newspaper history. As explained in the methodology, the new tools offered by digitization permit rapid tracking of the usage of words and ideas and exploration of how these ideas travelled within the same publication or across multiple items throughout centuries. However, despite the speed with which these results can be obtained and despite the richness of information embedded in those results, enthusiasm must be contained. The value of the results obtained via digital archives can be appreciated in depth only by bearing in mind the limitations of this new method of research. In the methods section of this thesis, it was stated that the first problem faced by the *digital detective,*[3] to use an epithet by which Bob Nicholson refers to a researcher exploring online newspapers' archives, is that many newspapers have not been digitized. In this thesis, for example, the gaps were evident in the newspapers' coverage of working-class related issues. The majority of newspapers digitized are those from the main Victorian urban centres, such as London, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. Little is known about local papers in rural villages whose value lies in being in close proximity to a lifestyle which was far away from the metropolis, such as miners' villages. The local newspaper *Halifax Guardian* is one such newspaper which does not have a digital presence.

[3] Bob Nicholson, 'Digital Detectives: Rediscovering the Scholar Adventurer', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45:2 (2013).

However, the copy-and-paste journalistic style, via which a newspaper extracted text from its competitors, showed this weakness of the digitized newspapers' page. When a newspaper acknowledged that the piece was from another publication, it put the title of the publication at the bottom of the article. Those minuscule letters seem to hint to the reader, saying: 'there is another story somewhere else'. And that somewhere else is not online. And this may be a worry and a relief at the same time. The worry comes from the fact that important information that could affect the understanding of a topic might be missing; the relief come from the fact that only a limited number of answers are provided by the virtual reality. Somewhere there is still a newspaper that waits to be browsed in its entirety from page one to page two. This brings us to the second obstacle for a digital detective: the contextual information surrounding a keyword.

A keyword search is mainly a semantic search: it focuses on one single word that a software package highlights. It focuses on smaller units of text, leaving out the general overview. The software says that a word is there but it does not explain why and how. It does not say what came first and what followed, it just records that on a specific day that word was used. Reading the whole article is never enough to provide the context: one would need to read all of the issues for that year and perhaps every single article. The keyword search provides a mapping of the usage of a specific term, but it is up to the researcher to rebuild the connections between articles, leaders and letters. Tracking the word 'skin' in the news coverage of trials helps because one must follow the track of the inquest so as not to miss information useful for the scope of this research: how newspapers portray the skin. This guidance was missing in the first findings chapter and some parts of the final findings chapter; as a result, the news portrayal of skin looks more scattered. This re-confirms that the autopsy is a crucial element for understanding the news portrayal of

skin because the story shows a clear structure with a beginning (first day of the inquest) and an end (final day of the inquest).

Today, however, in order to study the content of a newspaper to add new insights to the history of the press, the digital archive is a recommended tool. Online keyword searches, being a very specific tool, can work very well to access some specific information and less for other types of related information as they tend to narrow the focus. But as already observed in the methodology chapter, the necessary process of analysis attending any research work implies by definition the division of something larger and complex into simple, smaller parts. Focusing on those smaller parts might lead to the loss of that all-inclusive reality.

In terms of the options for extending this work beyond what has been achieved in this thesis, there are at least three possibilities that might benefit from further investigation. The first one pertains to time. This research could continue its investigation well into the twentieth century to see how new developments in both journalism and dermatology changed (if indeed they did) the news portrayal of human skin. Case studies could be extracted from the field of occupational diseases and from the wounded of World War I and II. Including the twenty-first century in the period investigated as well could permit the identification of continuities and ruptures in the news coverage of dermatology, thus shedding light on the relationship between past and present in the news portrayal of health in the UK.

The second possibility could be investigating today something that was missing from the Victorian newspapers: the media depiction of disfigurement. This would extend the research conducted by Claire Wardle *et al*. on contemporary television coverage of

disfigurement in the UK.[4] The findings provided by the exploration of skin in the Victorian popular culture could be integrated with Wardle's content analysis, putting it into an historical perspective and promoting a qualitative insight into the language used to describe disfigured people and how they are framed in the press and on television. By incorporating the work by Katherine Watson on acid-throwing in nineteenth-century Britain it could be possible to produce a social history of domestic violence, looking at the news portrayal of the wounds borne by the victims from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century.

A final aspect that could be developed is to look at the influences of religion on the newspaper's treatment of skin. This could be aided by adopting a comparative method contrasting countries with different forms of Christianity, such as Britain and Ireland. A starting point could be the images of Jesus Christ wounded on the cross and comparing the Protestant mode of portraying the human body with the Catholic one, and their reflection in the press depiction of the wounded boy. The starting point might then be Ernest Gilman's *Plague Writing in Early Modern England*, which compares the Italian and Reformed English way of portraying the plagues. This showed that in the portrayal of the plagues Catholic culture was more iconographic; while for the Protestants, the infliction of plague must be understood as a language event where the mark is a text to be read and not a symbolic image that functions as an intercessor with the divine.[5]

Behind a face

[4] Claire Wardle *et al.*, *Media Coverage and Audience Reception of Disfigurement on Television*. Cardiff University and Healing Foundation, 2009. Available at: http://cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/resources/09mediacoverageofdisfigurement.pdf [Accessed 10 September 2011].

[5] Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp.73 and 90.

This work demonstrated that the skin is a rhetorical device that can assume different meanings depending on the context in which it is used: legal, medical, political or literary. This thesis concludes with a reflection on the skin covering the convex surface of the spine. This is because the back's skin, for this thesis, is the page where stories of cruelties, social changes and scientific discoveries have mostly been written. And it was never a back chosen at random to be under scrutiny: it was always the back of the poor. When we think about skin we are inclined to immediately connect it with the appearance and the individuality encoded by a face. However, the investigation of the usage of the word 'skin' in Victorian newspapers suggested that the face might not tell a story which is hidden behind, on the back.

This research began with a front page of a contemporary British local newspaper showing the reddened and burnt back of a pensioner whose skin peeled off because of a toxic substance contained in a sofa's leather. The first chapter of the results confirmed the tendency to consider a face as the place *par excellence* where the skin resides. From this point of view the burnt skin of the twenty-first century Welsh pensioner and the white skin of the ideal Victorian woman's face engraved in newspapers appear unconnected. But then the nineteenth century news seems to acknowledge that if you want a good story on paper, it is not the face of an individual that you have to look at.

It was the back of a flogged soldier which made it possible to advance scientific discoveries and exert pressure to end a barbaric form of punishment. It was not easy to get this result: John White was exhumed twice, only after persistent requests from the coroner, before his spine could obtain the attention that it deserved. Once the marks on the skin and

underneath had been interpreted by the surgeons, the dynamic relationship between skin and the other organs was explained. This challenged the idea of skin as surface, promoted a few pages before in the advertisements section.

Would William Holding, Timothy Daly and Richard Gibson, the poor people living in workhouses, have lived longer if the nurses and doctors had taken care to look at their back? The neglected skin in bedridden patients is a typical indicator of the degree of medical assistance provided. The back is particularly indicative of the relationship between people and institutions because it is a place over which the individual has less control. The back is a reminder that humans do not have a total view of their body; nonetheless they can be seen by others.

Finally there is the back of the worker: the bent back, like the one of James Whiteley who bent under the blows of flogging and bent to work in the mine as well. It is a naked, scratched, wounded, and dust-covered skin which tells a story of oppression. They are wounds, those on the back, that a worker cannot reach to ease the irritation or urinate on to soften calluses. Those backs were reproduced in a few local newspapers. They occupy a small square, surrounded by the tiny printed words of the large newspaper sheet. Despite the technological advances of that time, photography and colour were still not in use and all you can see in that engraving is a white, intact skin which calls to mind a distorted Venus.

The skin's back constituted the main script for the newspapers. It is a script where you can read a social history of skin through the relationships of the individuals with the world they are in.

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17 February 1845
Graphic
2 November 1855
9 December 1882
29 January 1887
10 March 1888
25 August 1888
16 March 1895
23 November 1895
Hampshire Advertiser & Salisbury Guardian
5 December 1846
Hampshire Telegraph
21 November 1885
Illustrated London News
16 August 1851
7 June 1856
3 September 1859
21 July 1866
4 April 1885
25 July 1885
22 August 1885
19 February 1887
5 May 1888
7 July 1888
20 October 1888
31 May 1890
9 May 1891
Lancaster Gazette
28 January 1860
Leeds Mercury
28 July 1883

Manchester Guardian
18 November 1840
21 May 1842
17 July 1847
25 October 1848
23 August 1880
9 October 1893
Manchester Times and Gazette
21 August 1846
4 December 1861
1 November 1884
Mechanics' Magazine
4 October 1834
Morning Advertiser
1 September 1832
Morning Chronicle
15 May 1845
8 September 1849
7 June 1859
Morning Post
3 December 1840
1 August 1853
5 March 1856
17 June 1876
Northern Star
21 May 1842
28 May 1842
18 June 1842
Odd Fellow
28 May 1842
Pall Mall Gazette
18 October 1867
19 July 1870
Penny Illustrated Paper
14 December 1861
14 September 1889
25 December 1897
Political Register
1 July 1809
Preston Guardian
31 May 1851
21 April 1860
11 April 1885
Standard
20 June 1884
The Times
19 June 1811
25 August 1834
6 May 1842
14 May 1842
8 June 1842
10 September 1842
28 February 1843
7 March 1843
2 December 1844
2 January 1845
3 May 1845

15 May 1845
20 May 1845
2 July 1846
4 July 1846
16 July 1846
17 July 1846
20 July 1846
21 July 1846
27 July 1846
28 July 1846
31 July 1846
1 August 1846
4 August 1846
8 August 1846
11 February 1847
16 May 1848
15 May 1849
13 September 1849
5 June 1851
3 October 1853
12 April 1855
23 August 1856
19 August 1863
28 August 1863
2 September 1863
4 June 1864
28 December 1864
29 December 1864
9 January 1865
10 January 1865
11 January 1865
13 January 1865
16 January 1865
4 February 1865
6 February 1865
31 March 1865
17 May 1865
18 May 1865
27 October 1865
9 February 1867
12 May 1875
24 September 1880
28 September 1881
15 August 1891
20 July 1895
3 September 1895

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